

Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2025 / 2026

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Introduction

A complaint, for the purpose of this report, is defined as:

An expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Herefordshire Council, our staff or contractors.

A service request, for the purpose of this report, can be defined as:

A formal request that a member of the public, client or service user makes, asking a service provider to provide them with something that would be useful in the business's day-to-day operations.

A compliment, for the purpose of this report, is defined as:

A polite expression of praise.

Purpose of the Report

This report provides information on complaints and feedback received by Herefordshire Council for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 that relate to all services within the Council, excluding children's social care. Complaints about that specific service area are managed by a different statutory process and are subject to separate scrutiny.

What is the Corporate Complaints Procedure?

The aim of the Corporate Complaints Procedure is to make sure that:

- complaints are dealt with to a fair and consistent standard
- the Council responds to complaints in a reasonable timescale
- outcomes from complaints are documented and shared throughout the Council
- a 'do it once do it right' approach is taken to complaints

The Council has based its complaints procedure on guidance set out in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's 'Guidance on Running a Complaints System 2009'. The guidance explains the principles underpinning a successful complaints procedure:

What is a Complaint?

An expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response. It is important to note that there are exclusions within the Corporate Complaints Procedure and not all complaints will be addressed under this procedure, even if the resident has identified their concerns as a complaint. The following are examples of exclusions under this procedure:

- First time request for service
- Certain highways issues
- Suggestions for improvements to council services
- Council action or lack of action that affects more than one individual, such as local highways or community issues
- Claims for damages
- Matters where an alternative and more appropriate course of action exist

Complaints regarding work carried out by other organisations on the council's behalf may be investigated by the organisation concerned or the council team commissioning that service in the first instance, however, final stages of the complaints process will be managed by the Complaints Team. This includes organisations such as Hoople Ltd, Balfour Beatty Living Places, FCC, ACE adoption, adult social care providers and bailiffs.

This policy also covers second stage appeals for financial assessment for adult care and support charges.

The Role of the Complaints Team

The Corporate Complaints Procedure covers a wide range of Council services and infrastructure that are accessed and used by Herefordshire residents on a daily basis. The Complaints Team are responsible for

assessing complaints and feedback about these services and screen each one to identify the most suitable way to address the issues raised.

Classification of Complaints and Feedback:

Service requests:

Any new issues such as highways defects, parking problems or rights of way concerns are not considered under the Corporate Complaints Process and will be referred to the Council's relevant service.

Examples can include:

- Notification of a new highways problem that has not been reported before
- Update on an existing issue
- Requests to re-open a closed report
- Problem parking on a residential street
- Blocked footpath that is a right of way
- Notify the Council of a claim for damages

Enquiry/Comment/Not Eligible for Corporate Complaints Procedure:

A notable portion of matters received by the Complaints Team fall under these categories. The team will log and contact the service to obtain a response for the resident. Types of feedback for this category are:

- Roadworks causing delay or disruption/diversion route
- Follow up/query in respect of highways reports
- Standard of works completed
- A general comment or observation about a Council service
- Disagreement with a decision that has been made in line with council policy
- Suggestions for improvement
- Issues that affect a number of people, not an individual

Informal Resolution:

Complaints that are identified as Informal Resolution must be about issues that are eligible for the Corporate Complaints Procedure and can be resolved quickly and without the need for detailed investigation. There must be evidence of potential service failure but not to the extent that requires a formal investigation. The service must respond directly to the resident and endeavor to reach a suitable resolution. For example:

- Delay in receiving library book
- Problems with renewing Blue Badge or Bus Pass
- Difficulties in accessing online services

Formal Complaint:

An issue will be considered under the formal complaints procedure whereby there is evidence of potential service failure and that this has impacted directly on the person who is making the complaint. These can include:

- Blocked drain has not been inspected despite being reported to the Council. The situation has worsened, and water is encroaching on the resident's property
- Roadworks have prevented a resident accessing their property
- Changes to the lighting provision outside a property has resulted in the light shining directly into the resident's property and impacting on their day to day living
- Works not carried out despite being advised that they would take place
- Conduct of a member of staff towards a resident
- Affected resident not included in consultation of local project
- Evidence of an application for a service not considered properly

The Complaints Team will define the issues that require investigation from the information submitted by the complainant. This assists the process by:

- Identifying the key issues that require investigation
- Ensuring that each complaint is considered separately and provides the complainant with a clear decision as to whether their complaint has been upheld or not
- Captures themes and trends for reporting purposes

It is important that a complaint is dealt with via the correct process from the beginning to avoid any potential future maladministration. Issues that are not eligible for handling under the formal complaint's procedures will be directed as appropriate.

Complaints are directed to the relevant service area, and progress is monitored to ensure that a response is provided within corporate timescales. Complaints are responded to at the point of service delivery giving the service area subject of the complaint the opportunity to respond to any concerns raised about it. The manager of the service is also best placed to provide a knowledgeable and comprehensive response to the complaint. They can identify where things have gone wrong and propose a suitable remedy to the complainant.

The Complaints Team do not usually provide a response to complaints unless in exceptional circumstances. This is to provide the resident with confidence that the team offers an impartial service that can support them in making representation to the Council. The team provides advice to persons wishing to use these procedures and offers staff members support and guidance on how to appropriately handle and respond effectively to complaints about the Council.

Learning From Complaints

All officers investigating and responding to complaints are encouraged to document any identified learning that has arisen from the investigation in order that this information can be used to improve existing practices. Sharing details of the complaint and investigation are also done in team meetings to allow teams to contribute to future service improvements.

It is expected that in all circumstances, complaints are investigated properly and that complainants are treated fairly and with empathy. An apology will often be offered in recognition that the resident will have felt sufficiently aggrieved to contact the council to make a complaint, even in cases whereby the complaint has not been upheld.

Collation of Data

Complaints are collated on a bespoke database, e-case, that records details of the service subject of the complaint, the nature of the complaints raised, the outcome and remedies/learning.

Making a Complaint

In line with the Council's digital strategy, residents can contact the Complaints Team via a designated email address and online form. However, we do recognise that in certain circumstances, residents wish to have a conversation with the team and therefore we also have a direct telephone line which is available Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

Complaint Handling Code

Herefordshire Council adopted the Complaint Handling Code in April 2025, following its selection as a pilot Local Authority. The Code sets out a clear and consistent approach to complaint handling, designed to ensure complaints are managed fairly, effectively and in a timely way. Its primary aim is to support early resolution wherever possible, while also strengthening how learning from complaints is used to drive continuous service improvement.

As part of adopting the Code, the Council is working towards embedding a positive complaint handling culture across all services, where feedback is actively encouraged and used constructively. This includes ensuring there is a single, clear complaints policy in place, and that individuals understand what they can expect when raising a complaint. The Code also promotes seeking feedback from complainants on their experience, helping to further improve processes and outcomes.

The principles of the Code align with national best practice, enabling a more coordinated approach where services overlap. While the Code does not apply to areas with separate statutory complaint processes, such as certain children's and adult social care complaints, it provides a strong framework for the majority of complaints handled by the Council. Overall, adopting the Code represents a positive step in strengthening transparency, consistency and learning from complaints across Herefordshire Council.

Performance Metrics

Complaints and compliments have been categorised into each directorate.

There were **482** complaints processed through the Corporate Complaints Policy, a decrease in comparison to 560 received the previous year. Of 482 stage one corporate complaints received and investigated, 100 escalated their complaints to stage two.

NB: complaints about Adult Social Care and Children's Services are reported and analysed separately and will not be captured in the data within this report

Composition of Total Feedback Received

	<u>2024/2025</u>	<u>2025/2026</u>	<u>% Difference</u>
Corporate Stage 1	560	482	-13.93%
Corporate Stage 2	N/A	100	N/A
LGSCO	55	48	-12.73%
Compliments	174	310	+78.16%

Corporate Services Complaints

Corporate Services Directorate comprises of Governance and Law, Finance and HR&OD. The table below provides a breakdown of the complaints received by directorate in Corporate Services.

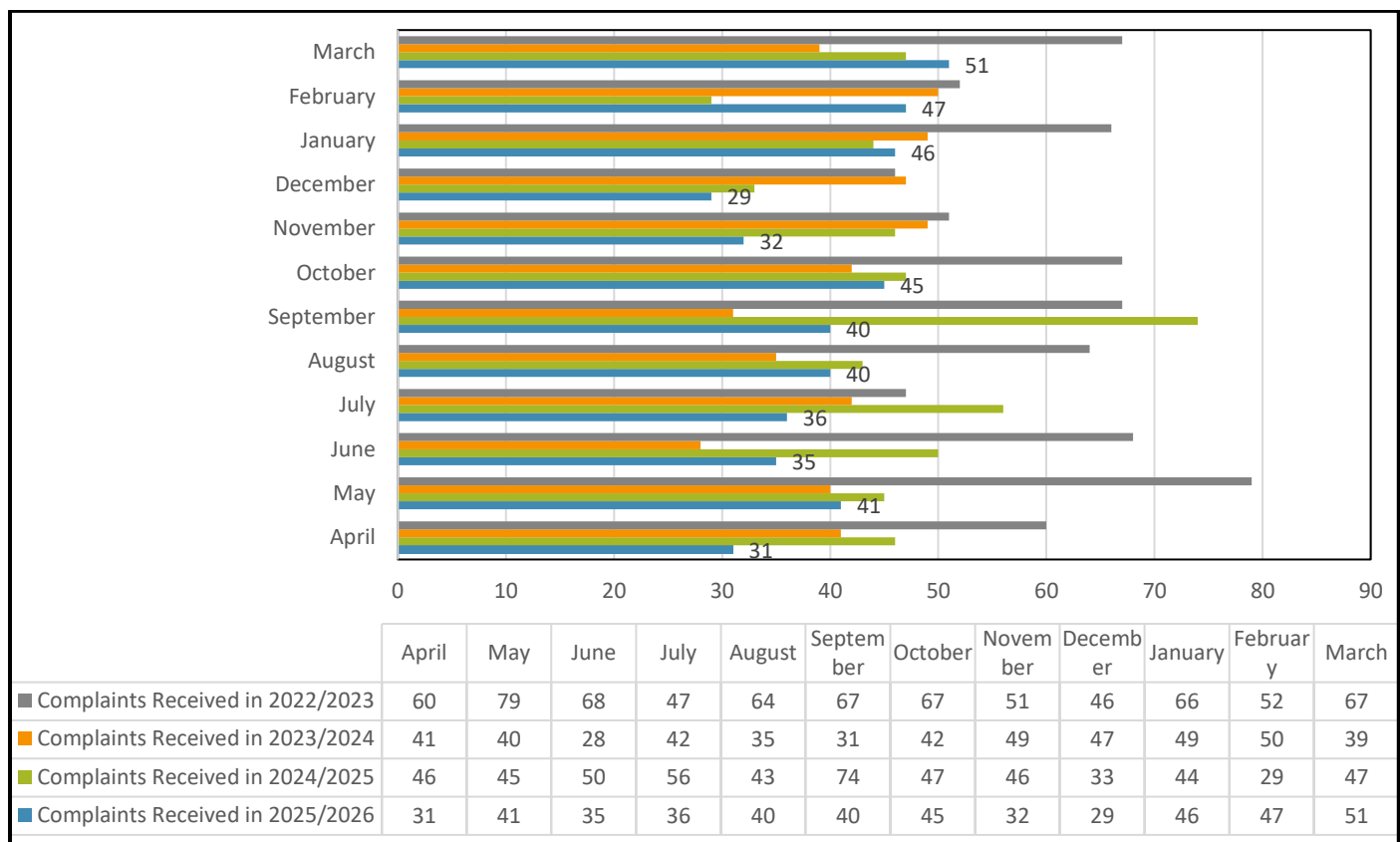
	Complaints Received	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Ontime Response	Late Response
<i>Governance and Law</i>	20	7	12	1	19	1
<i>Finance</i>	63	11	49	3	60	3
<i>HR&OD</i>	3	1	2	-	3	-

Complaints Comparative by month

The chart below shows complaints received, by month, in reporting year 2025/26, compared to reporting years 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25. Analysing the complaint data over the past four years reveals some interesting trends. Across the four-year period shown, there is a clear overall reduction in the number of complaints, which is a positive trend for the service. In 2022/23, complaint volumes are consistently the highest across almost every month, with several peaks between May and October (for example, May at 79 and October at 67). This noticeably reduces in 2023/24 and again in 2024/25, with 2025/26 showing the lowest and most stable figures overall, generally ranging between 29 and 51 complaints per month. This downward trend suggests that improvements in early resolution are likely having an impact, with more concerns being addressed by services before escalating into formal complaints.

Looking at monthly patterns, there are some consistent trends across the years. Late spring and summer months, May to September, tend to show higher complaint volumes, particularly in earlier years, possibly reflecting increased service demand or operational pressures during this period. In contrast, winter months such as December and January generally show lower levels, particularly in the most recent year.

Overall, the most recent year not only reflects fewer complaints but also less fluctuation month-to-month, which further supports the view that processes are improving and issues are being resolved more effectively at earlier stages.



Complaints Comparative by Year

The latest data shows an overall positive picture, with a general reduction in complaints across most service areas compared to 2023/24, and in some areas compared to 2024/25.

Economy and Environment continues to receive the highest volume, however complaints have continued to reduce year on year, indicating steady improvement despite high demand.

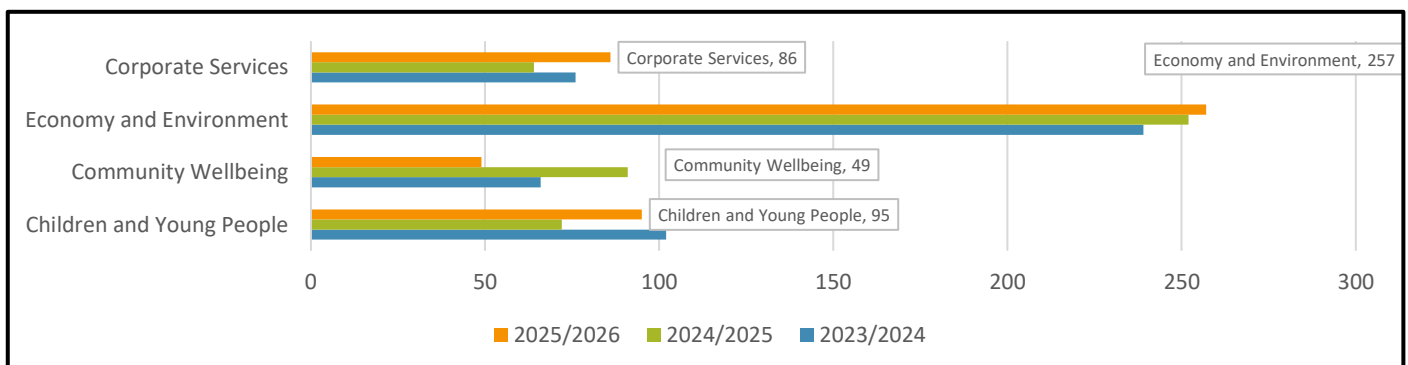
Community Wellbeing shows the most significant decrease, dropping from around 65 complaints in 2023/24 to below 50 in 2025/26, which suggests that changes in service delivery or earlier resolution are having a strong impact.

Corporate Services has also seen a positive reduction from approximately 75 complaints in 2023/24 to around 65 most recently.

Children and Young People is the only area showing an increase compared to last year, although levels remain broadly in line with earlier performance. This increase was predicted and is expected to continue to rise given the national pressures facing Additional Needs departments. Key reasons for the increase in complaints includes; failure to meet legal deadlines for issuing or reviewing EHCPs, often lasting months over the 20-week limit, prevents timely assessments largely due to shortage of specialists, it is reported that there is a national lack of educational psychologists and qualified staff. In addition to this, nationally there is a lack of suitable school places and failure to provide support outlined in existing plans. On top of this, year on year there is an increase in children requiring SEND support which has overwhelmed local services, creating, as described by the Department for Education, a "vicious cycle" of crisis. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has reported that around 80% of investigated SEND complaints are upheld, indicating deep systemic issues nationally. It has been noted, however, that the Ombudsman decided not to investigate a large proportion of SEND related complaints because the council admit fault in the early stages and provided a remedy, a practice seen widely in Herefordshire. For additional context, just 25 of England's 153 councils with SEND responsibilities made it through 2025 without having any LGSCO complaints upheld against them. In 2025, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman upheld 1,315 SEND complaints, 26% more than the 1,044 upheld in 2024. It is also more than five times the 236 upheld in 2021.

Overall, the downward trend across most areas is encouraging and suggests that services are becoming more effective at resolving issues at an earlier stage, reducing the need for formal complaints.

NB: Please note that the data shown under the Children and Young People's directorate fall under the corporate policy not the Children's Statutory Policy, this data is reported separately.

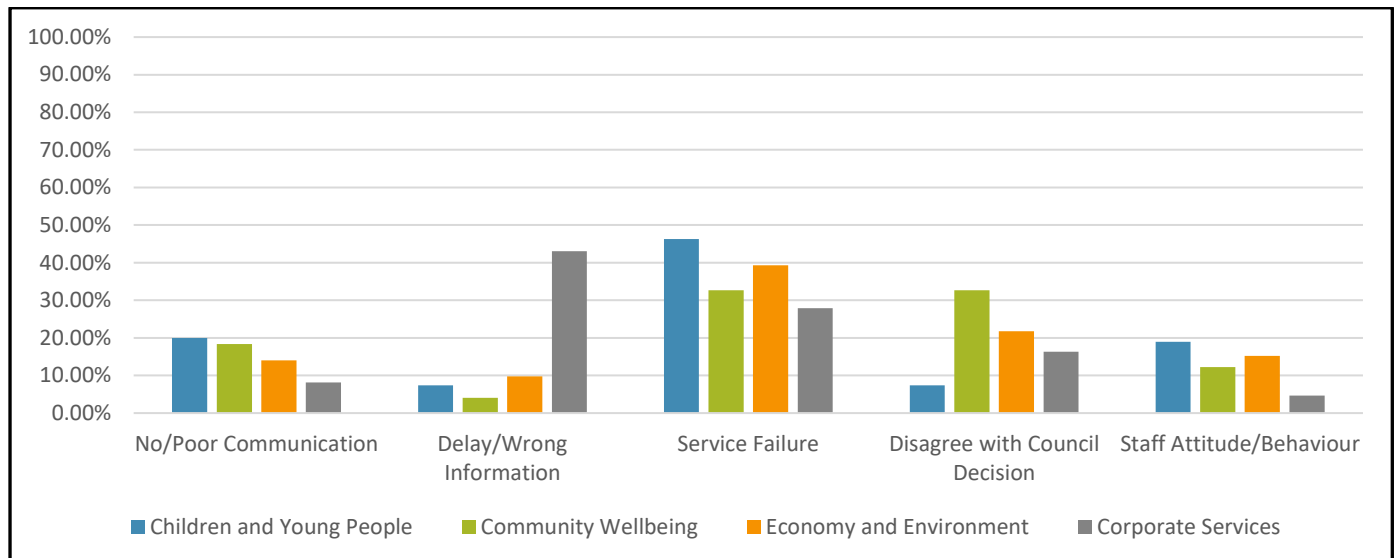


Complaints by category

Categories of complaint follow the most common categories for complaint identified by the Complaints Team when processing complaints.

NB: Service failure is defined by the LGSCO as:

- A failure in a service which it was the function of an authority to provide, or;
- A failure to provide such a service



The graph below shows the volume percentage of complaints received this year by category per directorate, it shows a mixed picture, with some clear strengths where complaint levels are low, but also several areas of concern where higher percentages indicate recurring issues. A key strength is that complaints categorised as No/Poor Communication and Staff Attitude/Behaviour are generally low across most services, particularly in Corporate Services, both under 10% and Economy and Environment showing at around 15%, suggesting that interactions with residents are largely positive and not a major driver of complaints.

However, there are notable concerns where percentages are higher. Service Failure is the most significant issue across all areas, particularly in Children and Young People and Economy and Environment indicating this is the main reason complaints are being raised and should be a priority for improvement. Whilst service failure is defined as a failure in a service which it was the function of an authority to provide, or a failure to provide such a service and these are service users interpretations, it is an area to be mindful of.

Similarly, Delay/Wrong Information is particularly high in Corporate Services with over 40% of complaints being categorised in this area, which stands out compared to other services and suggests a need for focused attention on timeliness and accuracy of information. This largely relates to Council Tax bills.

Disagree with Council Decision is relatively high in Community Wellbeing with around 33% complaints categorised, indicating a higher level of challenge or dissatisfaction with decisions in this area. In contrast, this category remains low in Children and Young People, which is a positive indicator.

Overall, while low levels in communication and staff behaviour are encouraging, the consistently higher percentages in service failure and, in some areas, delays or decision disputes highlight where improvement efforts should be focused to further reduce complaints.

		No/Poor Communication	Delay/Wrong Information	Service Failure	Disagree with Council Decision	Staff Attitude/Behaviour
Children and Young People	95	19	7	44	7	18
Community Wellbeing	49	9	2	16	16	6
Economy and Environment	257	36	25	101	56	39
Corporate Services	86	7	37	24	14	4

Timeliness of Responses: Stage One

The data shows a generally positive position in relation to timeliness, with some clear strengths alongside areas requiring attention.

A key strength is Corporate Services, where performance is very strong, with 82 out of 86 complaints concluded on time and only 5% late. This suggests effective processes, strong oversight, and consistent adherence to deadlines.

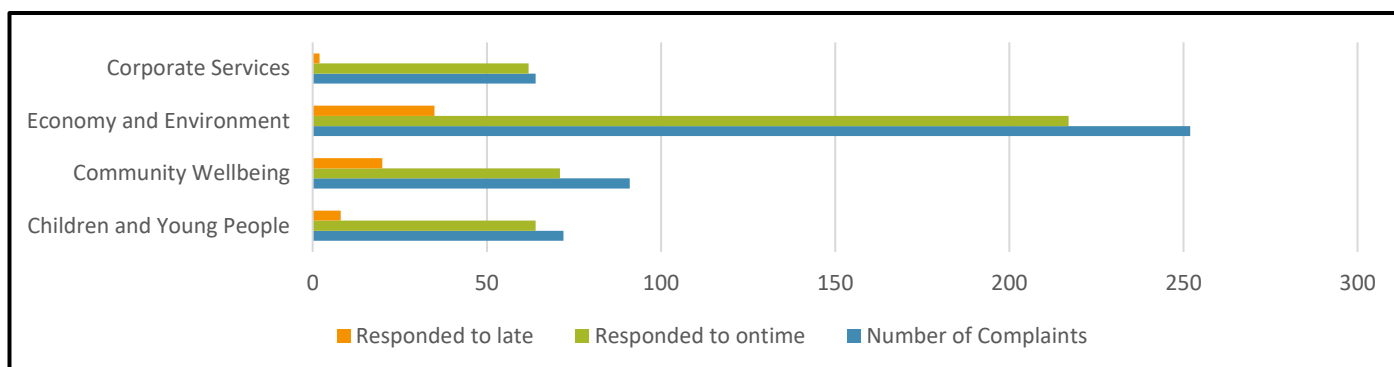
Children and Young People also demonstrates solid performance, with 82 out of 95 complaints completed on time and 20% late, indicating that most cases are being managed within expected timescales but the percentage remains outside of the 90% KPI target.

There are notable areas of concern, particularly within Community Wellbeing which has the most significant challenge, with over half of complaint investigations concluding late, which indicates ongoing pressures in meeting deadlines. It is important to note, however, that the complaints team has continued to work closely with services throughout the year, exploring different ways to provide support and improve processes to help ensure investigations are completed on time, which is a positive step towards addressing this issue.

Economy and Environment also shows some room for improvement, with 25% late responses, it represents a quarter of cases and is notable given the high overall volume of complaints in this area. Work has been undertaken with the relevant services areas to address these issues.

Overall, while there are strong examples of good performance, particularly in Corporate Services, the variation across services highlights some inconsistency. It is important to note that the KPI target for responding to complaints is 90%, and only Corporate Services has achieved this standard, further emphasising the strength of its performance. Continued focus on supporting Community Wellbeing and improving timeliness within Economy and Environment will help drive more consistent performance across all areas and support wider achievement of the KPI target.

	Number of Complaints	Ontime	Late	% late NB: KPI target 90% ontime
Children and Young People	95	82	19	20%
Community Wellbeing	49	24	25	51%
Economy and Environment	257	194	63	25%
Corporate Services	86	82	4	5%



Outcome:

Outcomes of complaint investigations can be defined as;

- **Upheld:**

The organisation has accepted it was at fault in all or most areas raised by the complainant or it only identified a small number of errors or technical faults but these had a significant adverse impact on the complainant or the wider public.

- **Partially upheld:**

The organisation found it acted without fault in most areas raised by the complainant. However, it identified a small number of errors or technical faults and these had very little impact on the complainant or the wider public.

- **Not upheld:**

The organisation found it acted without fault in all areas raised by the complainant.

- **Resolved:**

The organisation was able to agree action it should take with the complainant to resolve the complaint and did not have to investigate further to decide whether it acted with fault.

Number of Complaints (by directorate)	Number of complaints	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Resolved but investigated
<i>Children and Young People</i>	95	29	39	25	-
<i>Community Wellbeing</i>	49	16	22	11	-
<i>Economy and Environment</i>	257	67	137	46	7
<i>Corporate Services</i>	86	16	63	7	-

The chart shows a generally positive position, with a high proportion of complaints recorded as not upheld across all directorates, which indicates that in many cases the organisation has acted without fault, despite receiving a complaint.

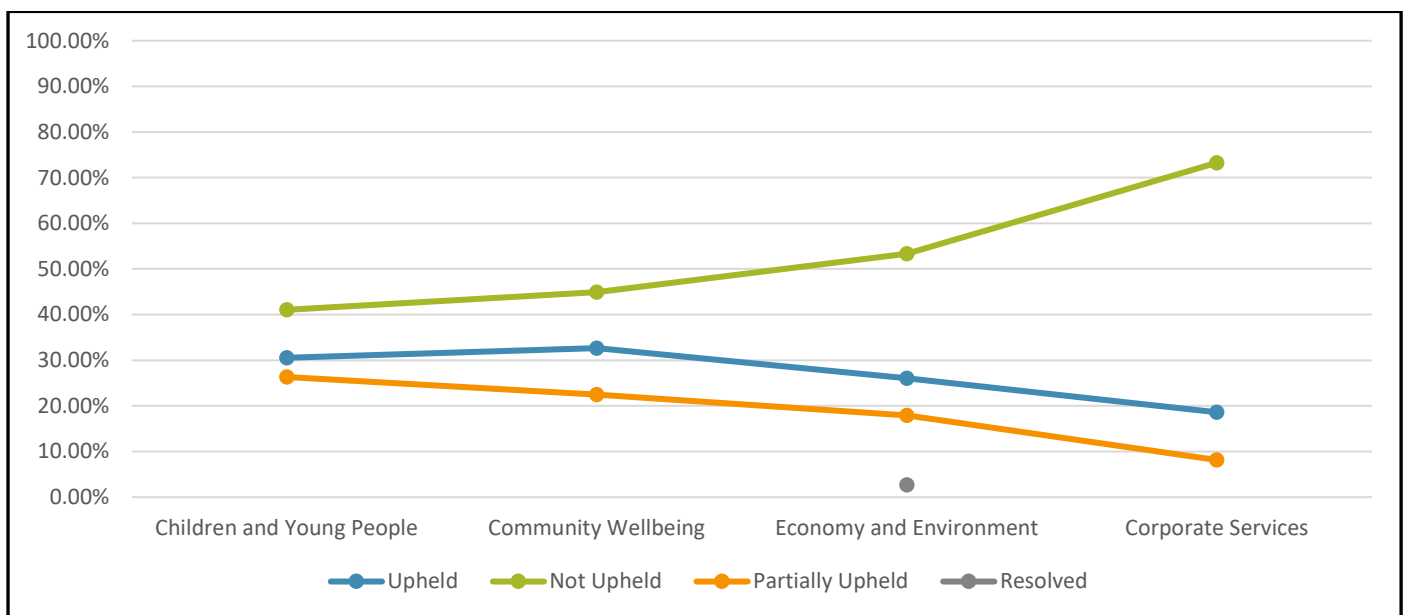
This is particularly strong in Corporate Services, where approximately 73% of complaints are not upheld, followed by Economy and Environment at around 53% and Community Wellbeing at approximately 45%. This suggests that, overall, services are acting appropriately in a large proportion of cases and that complaints are not always due to service failure.

The higher proportion of upheld complaints in Children and Young People can be understood in the context of significant pressures within SEND services, both locally and nationally. The highest level at around 30%, as explained earlier in this report, many complaints in this area relate to clear statutory duties, meaning complaints are more likely to be upheld. While the increase in upheld complaints highlights areas where statutory duties are not being met, it also demonstrates a level of transparency and willingness to acknowledge fault and put things right. Overall, the data reflects the challenging national landscape for

SEND services, rather than a decline in service intent, and reinforces the need for continued focus on capacity, early intervention, and systemic improvement.

Partially upheld complaints, which reflect limited or minor fault, sit at a moderate level across services. These are highest in Children and Young People and Economy and Environment, and lowest in Corporate Services. This indicates that, in some areas, small improvements could help reduce these lower level issues and prevent escalation.

Overall, the balance of outcomes is encouraging, with the majority of complaints either not upheld or only partially upheld. The relatively lower levels of upheld complaints demonstrate that significant service failures are not widespread. However, the higher upheld and partially upheld rates in certain services, particularly Children and Young People and Community Wellbeing, highlight where continued focus on service improvement and learning from complaints will be important.



Escalation to Stage Two

Stage two of the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code is the final internal review for complainants dissatisfied with the stage one response. It requires acknowledgment within five working days and a full written response within 20 working days. This stage focuses on reviewing the complaint at a senior level to ensure a final, thorough, and fair resolution.

Key aspects of Stage 2 in the Code:

- **Purpose:** To provide a fresh, senior-level review investigation of the complaint if the complainant remains unhappy after the Stage 1 response.
- **Timescales:** Organisations must acknowledge the stage 2 complaint within 5 working days and provide a final response within 20 working days. In some cases, the response time can be extended by a further 20 working days, but the complainant must be notified of the reason for the delay.
- **Final Decision:** This stage concludes the internal complaints process, after which the complainant can escalate to the relevant Ombudsman.

Of the 482 complaints received, 100 progressed to Stage 2, representing an escalation rate of 20.75%. While overall complaint volumes have reduced this year, this proportion indicates a higher rate of escalation, suggesting that a greater share of complainants remain dissatisfied following the Stage 1 response or feel further review is necessary. This may reflect increasing complexity of cases, higher expectations from complainants, improving awareness of the complaints process, and a noticeable increase in AI-generated complaints, which are often more detailed, structured, and more likely to challenge responses, potentially contributing to a higher likelihood of escalation.

At a directorate level, escalation rates vary. Children and Young People has the highest escalation rate at 24.21%, which is consistent with the complexity and statutory nature of many complaints in this area, particularly SEND related cases where dissatisfaction is more likely to persist.

Economy and Environment and Corporate Services are broadly in line with the overall average, suggesting a consistent pattern of escalation across these higher volume services.

Community Wellbeing has a lower escalation rate at 14.29%, which may indicate more effective resolution at Stage 1 or lower levels of ongoing dissatisfaction.

Overall, while the increase in escalation rates suggests some continuing dissatisfaction at the initial stage, the strong performance in meeting Stage 2 timescales is a clear positive. This demonstrates that once concerns are escalated, they are being handled robustly and in line with expected standards, supporting transparency and confidence in the complaints process. Continued focus on strengthening early resolution at Stage 1 will be key to reducing escalation rates over time.

Number of Complaints (by directorate)	Stage one complaints received	Stage two escalations	Escalation %
<i>Children and Young People</i>	95	23	24.21%
<i>Community Wellbeing</i>	49	7	14.29%
<i>Economy and Environment</i>	257	52	20.23%
<i>Corporate Services</i>	86	18	20.93%

Timeliness of Responses: Stage Two

Of the 100 escalations, 38 complainants received a late response (over 40 working days). Senior managers have 7 weeks/40 working days to complete a stage 2 investigation, late responses continue to be an area for improvement, particularly for E&E directorate. The data highlights a mixed position in relation to Stage 2 timeliness, with some clear strengths but also significant areas of concern.

A key strength is that 62% of Stage 2 complaints were completed within the required timescale, demonstrating that in the majority of cases, senior level reviews are being managed effectively and in line with the Complaint Handling Code. This reflects positively on oversight, prioritisation, and the ability of services to respond promptly once complaints are escalated. Corporate Services and Community Wellbeing show comparatively stronger performance, suggesting more effective control of Stage 2 processes within these areas. Community Wellbeing and Corporate Services, while performing better, still report late responses, indicating that timeliness at Stage 2 is a broader issue across all services, albeit to varying degrees.

However, there are notable and significant concerns, overall, 38% of Stage 2 responses were late, meaning over a third of complainants did not receive a response within the 40 working day timeframe. This is particularly pronounced in Economy and Environment, where 22 out of 52 cases were late, representing the most significant performance issue across all directorates. Given this service also handles the highest volume of complaints, this creates a substantial risk to service reputation and customer confidence.

Children and Young People also shows a relatively high level of delay, with 9 out of 14 complaint investigation concluding outside of the allotted timescales, indicating ongoing challenges in managing complex cases within required timescales. While some delay in this area may be linked to the complexity of complaints, the level of lateness suggests further improvement is needed.

Overall, while it is positive that the majority of Stage 2 complaints are completed on time, the high proportion of late responses represents a key area for improvement. It should be noted that Stage 2 is a new addition to the corporate complaints process, and a period of adjustment is expected as services embed new ways of working and adapt to increased senior level involvement. However, the 40 working day timescale is significant, and delays at this stage can have a considerable impact on complainant confidence and experience. Strengthening oversight, ensuring sufficient capacity, and maintaining focus on timely senior-level investigations will be critical to improving consistency and meeting expected standards across all directorates.

Number of Complaint Escalations (by directorate)		Ontime response	Late response	Late %
<i>Children and Young People</i>	23	14	9	64.29%
<i>Community Wellbeing</i>	7	5	2	40%
<i>Economy and Environment</i>	52	30	22	73.33%
<i>Corporate Services</i>	18	13	5	38.46

Compliments

Introduction

A compliment, for the purpose of this report, is defined as:
A polite expression of praise.

Since implementing the compliments@herefordshire.gov.uk email, we have received a high number of external compliments, particularly in the Children and Young People Directorate, this is widely promoted throughout the directorate. We've received a smaller number of compliments from Community Wellbeing directorate and Corporate Services but this remains limited along with Economy and Environment directorate.

Positive feedback about a service or member of staff can be made in a number of ways such as, by email, phone or directly to a member of staff. We record compliments that show a level of service or actions that go above what would normally be expected. Compliments are only logged if the positive feedback is made by a member of the public.

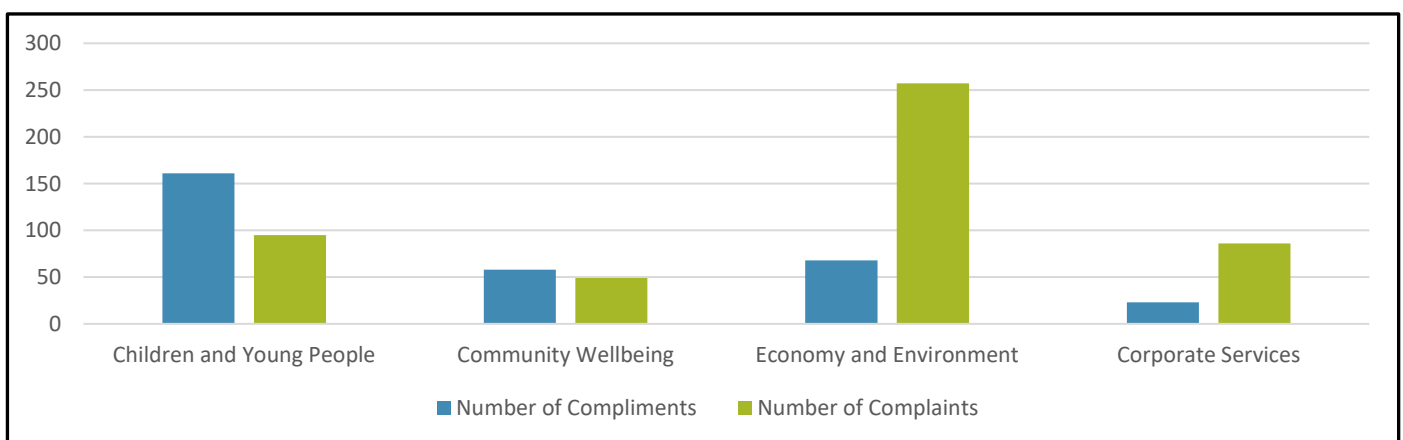
Performance Metrics

There were **310** compliments received via compliments@herefordshire.gov.uk from external professionals or organisations these compliments range from being about individual professionals to the whole service.

The data shows a broadly positive picture, with compliments increasing significantly overall, indicating improved customer satisfaction and more recognition of good service delivery. There are clear strengths in Children and Young People, where compliments are notably higher than complaints, and Community Wellbeing, where compliments slightly exceed complaints, suggesting generally positive service experiences in these areas.

However, in Economy and Environment, complaints significantly outweigh compliments, reflecting ongoing pressures in a high-demand service area. Similarly, Corporate Services has more complaints than compliments, although volumes for both directorates are lower overall.

Overall, the increase in compliments is encouraging and demonstrates improving engagement and service quality. However, the variation between directorates highlights where further focus is needed to balance customer experience. It should also be recognised that lower numbers of compliments do not necessarily reflect poorer performance in all cases, as some directorates, such as Corporate Services and Economy and Environment, are less directly front facing than areas, and therefore may naturally receive fewer compliments.



Category of Compliment

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Overall
2024/2025	34	38	35	67	174
2025/2026	78	90	66	76	310
+/-%	+78.5%	+81.25%	+88.57%	+13.42%	+78.16%

NB: internal compliments are logged with Employee Appreciation.

Compliments have been categorised into three areas of compliment; Specific Behaviours or Actions, Individual Skills and Qualities and Impact on Others

Specific Actions or Behaviours could include:

Responsiveness:

Compliments focused on how quickly and effectively a team or individual addressed a request or need. **Problem-solving:**

Acknowledging the ability to resolve issues or overcome challenges.

Efficiency:

Appreciation for completing tasks or processes quickly and smoothly.

Communication:

Compliments on clarity, transparency, and helpfulness in communication.

Guidance and Support:

Recognising when staff provide helpful advice, training, or assistance.

Professionalism:

Acknowledging courteous, respectful, and ethical conduct.

Individual Skills and Qualities could include:

Expertise:

Compliments on specialised knowledge or skills.

Empathy and Compassion:

Appreciation for understanding and caring for others' needs.

Creativity and Innovation:

Recognising original ideas or approaches.

Leadership and Mentorship:

Acknowledging positive influence and guidance.

Patience and Kindness:

Compliments on demonstrating these qualities, particularly in challenging situations.

Dedication and Commitment:

Recognising hard work and going the extra mile.

Impact on Others could include:

Positive Influence:

Acknowledging the impact of an individual's work on others.

Confidence Building:

Compliments on helping others feel more confident or capable.

Motivation and Inspiration:

Recognising individuals who inspire others.

Community Engagement:

Compliments on contributions to the broader community.

Creating a Positive Environment:

Acknowledging those who contribute to a positive and welcoming atmosphere.

		Specific Actions or Behaviours	Individual Skills and Qualities	Impact on Others
<i>Children and Young People</i>	161	24	70	67
<i>Community Wellbeing</i>	58	8	26	24
<i>Economy and Environment</i>	68	28	19	21
<i>Corporate Services</i>	23	4	9	10

Summary of Compliments Received

A total of 310 external compliments were received across the council during reporting year 2025/26. The compliments highlight strong professional practice, empathy, responsiveness, and positive impact across all directorates. Across the year, compliments consistently highlighted the quality of staff interactions, with recurring themes including empathy, kindness, professionalism, clear communication, and “going above and beyond.” These reflect a strong organisational culture where staff behaviours and values are positively experienced, even where service pressures exist. Compliments also provide valuable insight into what matters most to residents and partners, particularly feeling listened to, supported, and respected.

Across all compliments, clear themes emerged:

- Empathy, compassion, and kindness
- Clear, honest communication
- Reliability and consistency
- Professional expertise
- Responsiveness and timely support
- Building trust and strong working relationships
- Reduced stress for vulnerable adults
- Reassurance in crisis situations
- Feeling listened to, supported, and respected

Compliments by Directorate

Children and Young People

This directorate received the highest volume of compliments throughout the year, reflecting its highly customer-facing role and close work with children and families. Feedback consistently highlighted strong relationships, empathy, emotional support, and positive impact on outcomes for children, including improvements in confidence, wellbeing, and family relationships. Staff were frequently described as supportive, professional, and “going above and beyond.”

Community Wellbeing

Compliments in this area focused on practical support, responsiveness, and reassurance during challenging situations, particularly in housing, occupational therapy, and support services. Feedback emphasised kindness, professionalism, and clear communication, often during times of crisis, demonstrating the value of person-centred support.

Economy and Environment

Compliments highlighted effective problem solving, responsiveness, and improvements to local infrastructure and services, particularly public rights of way and community-facing functions. Residents recognised professionalism, efficiency, and willingness to go the extra mile, particularly where services had a visible impact on communities.

Corporate Services

While receiving lower volumes of compliments, this reflects the more limited direct customer-facing nature of the directorate rather than performance concerns. Feedback received was consistently positive, focusing on professionalism, clear communication, and high quality complaint handling, with particular appreciation for calm, supportive engagement during complex or sensitive issues.

Lessons Learnt

When allocating a complaint to an internal investigating officer, along with the response template we sent the below learning template. Previously it was identified that completing two documents when responding to a complaint, given officers workloads, was unreasonable and it was shared as the reason for officers not completing this form. Following this feedback, the learning template was added into the response template, meaning investigating officers can complete all necessary information on one form and return this to the complaints team.

Unfortunately, although we have seen some improvement we are still seeing a significantly low number of forms being returned. Lessons learnt from complaints is a useful tool for continuing and allowing us as a Local Authority to be accountable and continue to improve, without this information we cannot take learning forwards to teams and we expose ourselves to the risk of reoccurring complaints by not acknowledging there may be some depth to the concerns being raised.

Learning Template

Case reference number CCMPT12023/01267	Has an advocate been involved Y/N	What category the complaint was about (Service failure/ Delay / Poor Communication/ Staff Attitude / Wrong Information Given)	Outcome of complaint (Up-held, Not up-held)
What were the underlying causes of the complaint? (e.g. poor record keeping)		What has changed? How will we ensure that this doesn't happen again?	
Was the complaint resolved within agreed timescales? If not, why not			

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Ombudsman investigates complaints about the actions taken by or on behalf of a council or authority. The service is independent, free and impartial. The Local Government Act gives the Ombudsman the powers of the High Court to require the production of evidence held or witnesses.

The main statutory functions for the Ombudsman are:

- to investigate complaints against councils and some other authorities
- to investigate complaints about adult social care providers from people who arrange or fund their adult social care (Health Act 2009)
- to provide advice and guidance on good administrative practice.

When investigating a complaint, the Ombudsman will look at whether there has been evidence of fault by the council and any injustice caused to the complainant. Following this the Ombudsman will recommend a proportionate appropriate and reasonable remedy to the complaint.

Enquiries – These instances are where the complainant has approached the Ombudsman with their complaint. The Ombudsman will then contact the Council to ask for further information to consider whether they will carry out a full investigation into the complaint. Should the Ombudsman decide that they will not carry out a detailed investigation, the complaint will be closed.

Not Investigating – On occasion, the Ombudsman may receive a complaint that it will not investigate. Reasons for this can be as follows:

- Alternative legal remedy
- Insufficient fault of justice
- Complaint referred to the Ombudsman over one year after the incident subject of the complaint occurred

Investigation – An investigation will take place if the Ombudsman is of the view that the issues raised meet the tests set out in its Assessment Code. The Council will be advised of the investigation and the Ombudsman will specify what information it requires from the Council to investigate the complaint. Once the investigation has been completed, Draft Decision will be issued, and the Council and complainant will be invited to comment on this. The Ombudsman will then issue its Final Decision Statement on the complaint which details its findings and any recommendations that it expects the Council to implement. This can include changes to procedure or practice and financial payment to the complainant.

Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	Closed after initial enquiries	Assessed and closed
Closed after initial enquiries – out of jurisdiction	Closed after initial enquiries	Assessed and closed
Upheld: no further action	Upheld	Investigated/ Complaints upheld
Upheld: fault and injustice	Upheld	Investigated/ Complaints upheld
Upheld: fault – no further action, organisation already remedied	Upheld	Investigated/ Complaints upheld/ Satisfactory remedies provided by the Council
Upheld: fault & inj – no further action, organisation already remedied	Upheld	Investigated/ Complaints upheld/ Satisfactory remedies provided by the Council

Upheld: fault, no injustice	Upheld	Investigated/ Complaints upheld
Report Issued: Upheld; fault, and injustice	Upheld	Investigated/ Complaints upheld
Report Issued: Upheld; fault no injustice	Upheld	Investigated/ Complaints upheld
Not upheld: no further action	Not upheld	Investigated/ Complaints upheld
Not upheld: no fault	Not upheld	Investigated/ Complaints upheld
Report issued: Not upheld; no fault	Not upheld	Investigated/ Complaints upheld

At time of writing this report, **2** open cases are still being investigated from this timescale; 1, Economy & Environment, 1 Corporate Services.

The LGSCO has contacted the Council regarding 48 communications from a Herefordshire member of the public. These communications relay to the following directorates;

Children and Young People, **10**

Economy and Environment, **9**

Community Wellbeing, **12**

Corporate Services, **17**

NB: there are also the final decisions from the year before that have come in this year, these are included in the data as it would not have been previously reported on.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Decisions

Children and Young People Directorate	
Nature of complaint	LGSCO Decision
Council's refusal of request to allow summer born child to start Reception at school after fifth birthday	Upheld: Fault and Injustice
Complaint about the Council's sharing of information about a school admissions appeal	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction.
Complaint Council investigated safeguarding concerns made about them	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
School delayed entry procedure	Not upheld: no further action.
Complained about the Council's failure to provide child with the provisions in Education, Health and Care Plan and its failure to provide suitable alternative provision when stopped attending school. Also complained about the Council's delays with completing the annual review Plan	Upheld: Fault and Injustice
Council failed to complete an annual review of child's Education, Health and Care Plan.	Invalid/Forwarded Decisions
Failed to complete an annual review of an Education, Health and Care Plan on time and failed to provide a right of appeal in 2023. The Council also failed to consider if its duty to provide alternative provision under s.19 Education Act 1996 was engaged when a pupil had to be withdrawn from school	Upheld: Fault and Injustice

The Council failed to secure special educational provision and failed to provide alternative education	Upheld: Fault and Injustice
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Community Wellbeing Directorate	
Nature of complaint	LGSCO Decision
Housing Solutions failing to find suitable alternative accommodation housing larger families or needing temporary suitable accommodation.	Upheld: Fault and Injustice
Appeal process hompoint	Upheld: no further action, organisation already remedied
Complaint Council left the family in B&B accommodation and delayed issuing a decision on the homelessness application.	Upheld: Fault and Injustice

Economy & Environment Directorate	
Nature of complaint	LGSCO Decision
Highway claim	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Household Recycling Centre officer	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Household Recycling Centre and disabled booking	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
House of Multiple Occupancy licence and staff misconduct and harassment	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction.
Obstruction of the highway.	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction
Blue Badge misuse investigation	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Lack of planning enforcement and loud noise parties	Not upheld: No Fault
Complained about the way the Council dealt with planning application and planning enforcement issues relating to their neighbour's land.	Upheld: Fault and Injustice

Corporate Services	
Directorate: Governance & Law	
Nature of complaint	LGSCO Decision
Hug Grant	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction
Published alleged false and inaccurate minutes	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Unreasonable behaviour sanctions	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Code of Conduct complaint outcome	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Code of Conduct complaint outcome	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction
Code of Conduct complaint outcome	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
School appeal panel rejection	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Complaint regarding Monitoring Officer	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction

Code of Conduct complaint outcome	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Code of Conduct complaint outcome	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Code of Conduct complaint outcome	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action

Corporate Services	
Directorate: Finance	
Nature of complaint	LGSCO Decision
Understanding payment spreadsheets	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Wants the Council to reverse its decision on council tax liability	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction
Council Tax and criteria for a Class F exemption and not act on the information provided	Upheld: no further action, organisation already remedied
Challenge to Council Tax liability	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction.
Council tax arrears	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction.

Analysis, Key Messages & Recommendations

Analysis

The 2025/26 reporting year reflects a positive and improving position for Herefordshire Council, with clear evidence of reduced complaint volumes, increased compliments, and strengthening complaint handling processes. Overall complaints have reduced by 13.9%, while compliments have significantly increased by 78%. This indicates a shift towards improved customer experience and service quality, alongside a more open and positive feedback culture.

The adoption of the Complaint Handling Code in April 2025 has supported greater consistency, transparency, and early resolution across services, contributing to fewer complaints escalating and more issues being addressed at an earlier stage.

Despite these improvements, there are clear areas of pressure, particularly in timeliness at both Stage 1 and Stage 2, and ongoing service pressures within key directorates.

Key Messages

- Complaints reduced across most services year on year.
- Compliments increased significantly, reflecting stronger engagement and recognition of good service.
- The balance of feedback shows a more positive experience for members of the public overall.
- Reduced complaint volumes and stable monthly patterns suggest issues are increasingly resolved before escalation.
- The introduction of the Complaint Handling Code is likely supporting better consistency and early intervention.
- Across all directorates, Service Failure is the most common category, particularly in Children and Young People and Economy & Environment. This reflects process, capacity, and delivery issues, rather than behavioural concerns.
- Complaints related to staff attitude and communication are consistently low, which is a key strength.
- Compliments demonstrate that “how services are delivered” is a clear organisational strength and strongly highlight:
 - Empathy and kindness
 - Professionalism
 - Strong communication

- KPI target is 90% for on time responses, but only Corporate Services achieved this. Significant concerns within:
 - Community Wellbeing: 51% late
 - Economy & Environment: 25% late
- Stage 2 performance is also an area of concern:
 - 38% of responses late
 - Particularly high in Economy & Environment with 73% late
- 20.75% of complaints escalated to Stage 2, showing higher dissatisfaction at Stage 1. Contributing factors include:
 - Increasing case complexity
 - Higher expectations
 - Increased use of AI-generated complaints
- Predicated increase in complaints, higher upheld rates reflect statutory duties not being met, rather than poor service, complaints relating to SEND highlight
 - System pressures:
 - Delays in EHCPs
 - Capacity shortages
 - Rising demand
- Low return rates of learning templates limit the ability to identify trends, prevent repeat issues which presents a risk to continuous improvement.

Recommendations

Recommendation:

Ensure all directorates consistently meet the corporate KPI of 90% of complaints responded to on time.

- Assign senior manager accountability for overdue complaints.
- Provide quarterly targeted support sessions led by the Complaints Team for underperforming services.
- Continue to support monthly monitoring in Community Wellbeing until performance stabilises.

Recommendation:

Improve performance at Stage 2 to reduce delays and meet the 40 working day response requirement.

- Provide training for senior managers on Stage 2 expectations and investigation standards, particularly for those not booked onto the LGSCO complaint handling training.

Recommendation:

Embed a consistent approach to capturing and applying learning from complaints.

- Publish “You Said, We Did” on the website.
- Incorporate complaint learning into service improvement plans and appraisals.

Recommendation:

Improve stage one resolution to reduce escalation rates and improve customer satisfaction.

- Encourage direct contact with complainants early in the investigation.
- Introduce a “resolution first” approach, prioritising practical remedies where possible.
- Provide training for investigating officers on effective communication and resolution techniques.

Recommendation:

Leverage compliment data to reinforce positive behaviours and improve service standards.

- Share real examples of positive feedback (anonymised) in staff briefings.

Further training: Provide further training to those dealing with complaints.

<https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/information-for-organisations-we-investigate/effective-complaint-handling>