

**Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview & Scrutiny
Committee
7th June 2023**

**Customer Feedback Annual Report
1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.**

Recommendation

That the Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the content of the report

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This is the Annual Report for the Resources and Fire & Rescue Services Compliments, Complaints, Questions and Comments covering the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

1.2 The report summarises the compliments, complaints, questions, and comments received by the two services including the lessons learned. The data, trends and themes have been collated over the last 3 years.

2. Corporate Complaints Process

The Council has a Corporate Complaints Process as part of the overall Complaints Policy which involves two stages and includes the following:

2.1 Stage one, complaints are investigated and responded to by the appropriate service area. Complaints should be responded to within 10 to 30 working days. The expectation should be to complete stage 1 complaints within 10 working days where possible and the maximum timescale would be where the complaint is considered more complex to deal with.

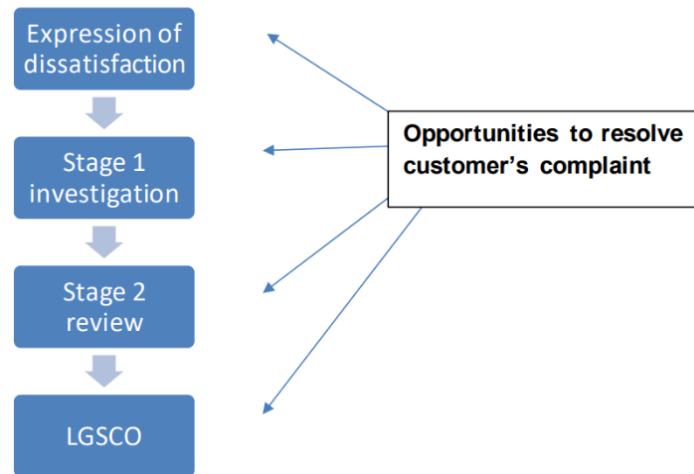
2.2 Stage two, if a customer remains dissatisfied with the response that has been given a complainant can request their complaint to be escalated to stage two. The Council's Customer Relations Team is responsible for the stage 2 review process and the expectation is to complete the stage 2 review if this is undertaken within 30 working days. The County Council Complaints Policy states that:

“Complaints about all other services have a two-stage (non-statutory) process but there is no automatic right to take a complaint to stage two. The customer must provide an explanation of why and how the initial response failed to fully address their concerns, and evidence what element(s) of the complaint have not been answered.”

2.3 After consideration, if it is decided that there is no reason to escalate the complaint to a stage two review, this will be explained within ten working days.

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

2.4 If a complainant remains unhappy after exhausting all stages of a complaints process, the complainant can take their complaint to the LGSCO. A complainant can access the LGSCO at any point during the complaint process; however, the LGSCO normally allows the Local Authority the opportunity to process a complaint through every stage of the appropriate complaints procedure, before investigating it themselves. Complaints referred to a Local Authority by the LGSCO to process under the relevant complaints process are classed as 'premature' complaints- <https://www.lgo.org.uk/>



3. Analysis of the Customer Feedback Received During 2022 and 2023

3.1 Feedback from members of the public is recorded on a customer relations system referred to as 'Contact Us.' Feedback can be shared through either an online portal, email, post or via telephone, and is categorised into Complaints, Compliments, Comments or Questions. Depending on the type of contact, feedback will be processed through different internal procedures.

3.2 The County Council takes every submitted case seriously, especially complaints, as it wants to make sure its complainants are dealt with fairly, consistently and within timelines. It is essential that the Council is dealing effectively with all feedback to provide efficient services, learning and improvements. Procedures relating to how it deals with and responds to complaints is detailed in the complaints policy - <https://api.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/WCCC-550390340-762>. This policy has been developed in line with best practice recommendations and legislation that covers complaints about local authority services. This policy is also being reviewed and updated to ensure it covers all up to date legislation. In the policy, a complaint is defined as:

"...any expression of dissatisfaction with a service that the Council (or one of its partners or contractors) has provided, and that requires a response."

Method of Analysis

3.3 This report provides a summary of all cases that were submitted to Contact Us during 2022/2023 and sets this in relation to cases received over the previous three years. This report focuses on cases allocated to the Resources Directorate and the Fire and Rescue Service, whilst Customer Feedback reports about the Communities Service, Adult Social Care and Public Health Services, and Children and Families and Education Services will be reported to the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committees.

3.4 Data presented in this report was obtained directly from 'Contact Us.' Some service areas also receive communications from customers directly which are not always logged on the Contact Us system, such as emails or postal letters. Service areas have shared examples of compliments received directly, which can be found in Appendix 1, however this is not included within Contact Us data reporting

3.5 Data was extracted for the past three years, i.e., 2020/2021; 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. Where appropriate, data was aggregated over different time intervals, and averages and percentage changes over time were calculated. In all sections, data is presented as percentage, with the number of cases this refers to in parentheses (n= number of cases).

3.6 The lessons learned presented at the end of this report were thematically coded into categories prior to their inclusion in this report. This means that lessons learned that addressed related topics were grouped together, to be able to make statements about the frequency of how often specific recommendations were made.

Trends in received cases over time

3.7 During 2022/2023, there were a total of 4,335 cases raised on Contact Us across all Directorates of the Council. This shows a decrease in the total number of cases of 13.6% compared to the previous year 2021/2022, where there was a total of 5,017 cases. The number of cases received in the 2021/2022 year is greater than the number of cases received during 2020/2021, with 4,737 total cases.

3.8 Comparing the type of cases received highlights that the volume of cases have overall decreased from 2021/2022 to 2022/2023, particularly for the volume of questions and compliments.. While the number of questions and compliments remained similar between 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, in 2022/2023 these figures decreased by 13.3% and 32.4% compared to 2021/2022 (Figure 1).

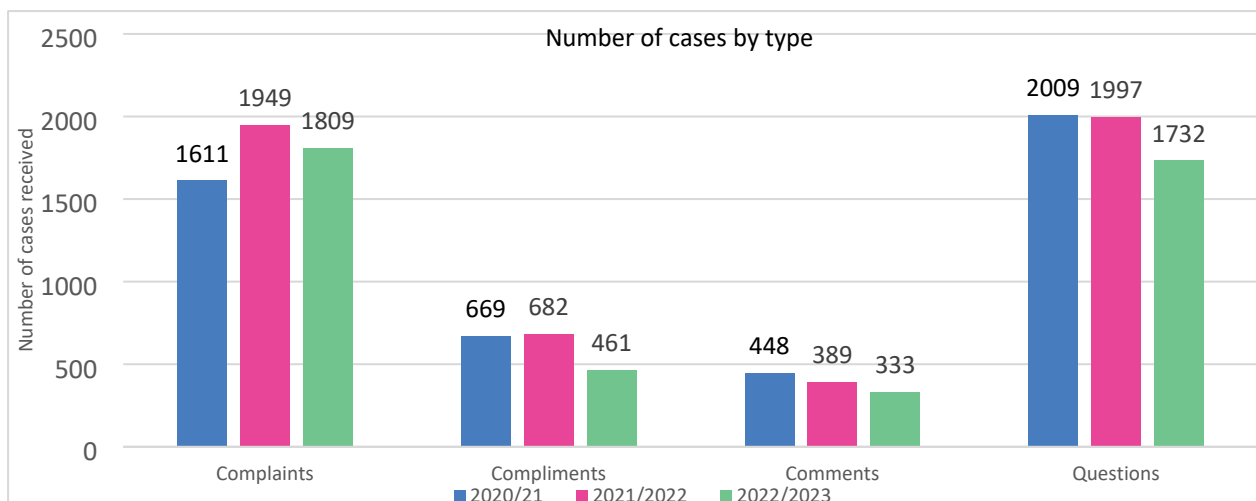


Figure 1: Number of cases received during the years 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 across all directorates within the council by type of case.

3.9 Once a case is received, it is reviewed by the Customer Relations Team (CRT). Depending on each case, the CRT can assign a case to the team it concerns or complete a case themselves. This occurs when cases:

- are referencing a service that is not provided by the Council, for example, a complaint about a faulty alarm at a neighbour's residence, the complainant would be advised to contact the resident and/or business owner concerned;
- do not fall in the specific subject area of any other Council team, for example, a complaint in respect of waste collection from customers' homes would be referred to the relevant district or borough council;
- are submitted anonymously and cannot be followed up. Often the anonymous complainant will complain that they have not received a reply which again cannot be replied to. If an anonymous complaint is of a serious or dangerous nature, the CRT would advise the relevant service area, if the information contained meant follow up action is possible; or
- are resolved by the CRT as it has a broad knowledge of many areas so can answer and close questions and comments without sending them to the service area the complaint is referring to.

3.10 During 2022/2023, 1,915 (44.2%) cases were assigned to the CRT, which is an increase of 9.1% compared to the previous year. Compared to 2020/2021, cases assigned to the CRT have nearly doubled. It is important to note in terms of numbers assigned to CRT this reflects an escalation of the complaint in some way with majority of the cases requiring the CRT to oversee the complaint on behalf of another operational service area. This includes cases which have been assigned to a service team and assigned back to CRT. Of the remaining 2,420 cases received during 2022/23, 389 were assigned to the Resources Directorate, and 22 to the Fire and Rescue Service (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of cases assigned to the Resources Directorate and the Fire and Rescue Service by type over the previous three years.

Area	Resources Directorate			Fire and Rescue		
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Complaints	170	269	207	4	3	3
Compliments	16	22	5	1	1	1
Comments	62	27	15	9	8	1
Questions	243	222	162	34	45	17
Total	491	540	389	48	57	22

3.11 In 2022/2023, the number of cases the Resources Directorate received was a 28% decrease from 2021/2022 and 20.8% decrease from 2020/2021. These cases were comprised of 53.2% complaints, 1.3% compliments, 41.6% questions, and 3.9% comments. Since 2020/2021, the percentage of complaints has increased from 34.6% to 53.2%. However, there has been a subsequent decrease of 23.04% in the percentage of complaints since 2021/2022. In terms of comments, there has been a decline from 5.0% in 2020/2021 to 3.9% in 2022/2023. Similarly, the percentage of questions also decreased from 49.5% to 41.6% in 2022/2023.

The Fire and Rescue Service received 22 cases in 2022/2023, a 61.4% decrease from 2021/2022, and 54.2% from 2020/2021. These cases were comprised of 13.6% of complaints, 77.3% of questions, 4.5% comments and 4.5% compliments.

Complaints Data

Data on Complaints Received via Contact Us

3.12 When comparing the number of complaints received by the Resources Directorate per month over the past three years, the year 2022/2023 peaked in the number of complaints in March 2023 (Figure 2). A breakdown of the number of complaints received by each Service for the year 2022/2023 is shown in Figure 3.

3.13 In respect of the January 2022 spike, it was noted how a small number of customers can impact significantly on complaint numbers. For example, Contact Us records showed for eight repeatedly dissatisfied customers, there are also 56 Contact Us records since April 2021. These 8 customers have overall resulted in 86 Contact Us records. There are several reasons for these repeated complaints, including some using the self-account function repeatedly.

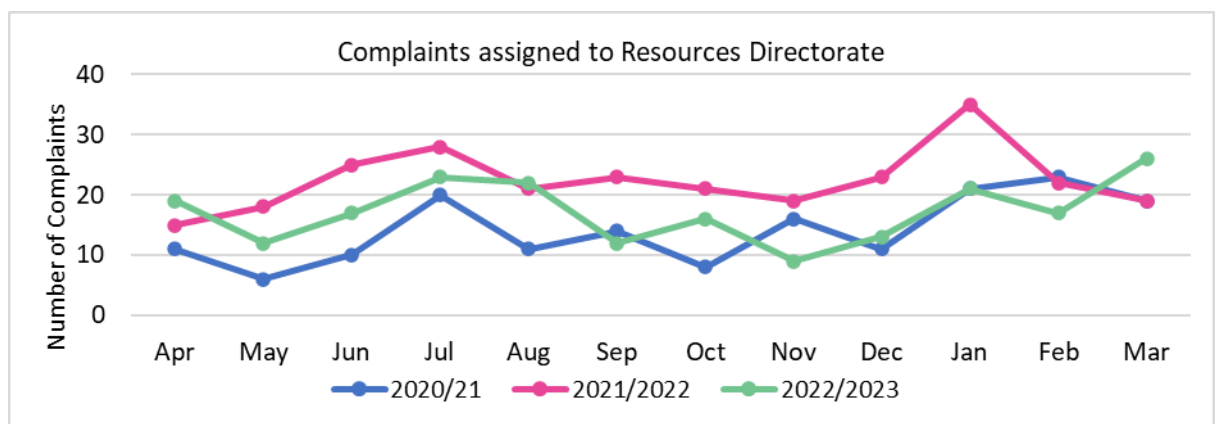


Figure 2: Number of complaints assigned to the Resources Directorate in each year from 2020/21.

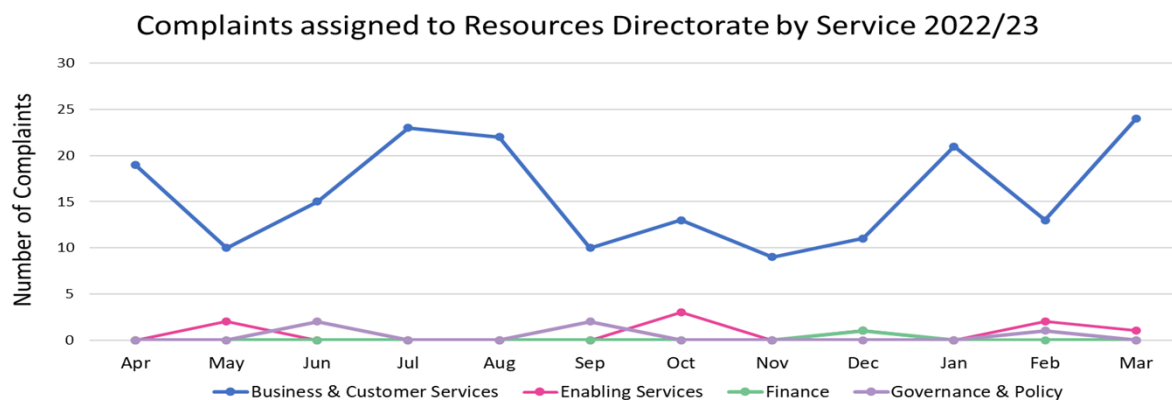


Figure 3: Number of complaints assigned to the Resources Directorate broken down to Service Level in 2022/23.

3.14 The volumes of complaints received by the Fire and Rescue Service are less than 5 for each year.

3.15 Within the Resources Directorate, case volumes were influenced by several teams, of which the Customer Relations Team has made up the highest percentage since 2020/2021, with 70.5% (n=146) of complaints assigned to this team during 2022/2023. In comparison, the Customer Relations Team had 73.6% (n=198) complaints assigned in 2021/2022 and 46.5% (n=79) complaints in 2020/2021. In 2022/2023, this was followed by the Warwickshire Local Welfare team in the Customer Service Centre with 10.6% (n=22) of cases and Libraries accounting for 3.4% (n=7).

3.16 For both Resources and Fire and Rescue Services, most of all complaints that were received related to the initial investigation (Stage 1). In 2022/2023, stage 1 complaints made up 57.0% (n=118) for the Resources Directorate and 100% (n=3) for the Fire and Rescue Service.

3.17 The remaining complaints assigned to the Resources Directorate related to stages 2 and 3, 21.7%(n=45) and 4.8% (n=10) respectively. The higher number of complaints linked to CRT reflect more customers escalating their complaint to the next level of the complaints process and indicates more customers remain dissatisfied with the outcome at stage one.

3.18 For Resources Directorate LGSCO cases assigned at service level accounted for 8.7% (n=18) while other was 7.2% (n=15) and 0.5% (n=1) were unknown. Of the 7.2% 'Other,' this related to complaints which were incorrectly categorised and staff have been reminded of the need to ensure data is completely accurate. 83.3% related to answers to questions and the remaining 16.7% related to further information on closed cases.

3.19 During 2022/2023, subject categories of complaints assigned to the Resources Directorate most often related to issues with Communication and Protection of user, which refers to feedback implying concern for the welfare or safety of another person or child (Table 2).

Table 2: Subject Categories of complaints assigned to the Resources Directorate during 2022/23.

Subject Categories	Resources Directorate	
	Number of cases	%
Protection of user	44	21.3%
Communication	63	30.4%
Staff conduct	24	11.6%
WCC Service standards	30	14.5%
Financial Issues	25	12.1%
Physical environment issues	14	6.8%
Discrimination	1	0.5%
Policy	0	0.0%
Commissioned Service Provision	5	2.4%
Outside contact us process (Non WCC related issues)	1	0.5%

3.20 In 2020/2021, 54.1% (n=92) of the Resources Directorate complaints were about communication issues, which decreased to 47.2% (n=127) in 2021/2022 and 30.4% (n=63) in 2022/2023. Complaints regarding protection of users were 7.6% (n=13) in 2020/2021, increased to 24.2% (n=65) in 2021/22 and decreased to 21.3% (n=44) in 2022/2023.

3.21 The Fire and Rescue Service complaints were solely logged as communication, physical environmental issues or outside contact us processes.

Complaints Closed

3.22 Complaints closed by the Resources Directorate varied in the last three years, with a total of 171 in 2020/2021, increasing to 238 in 2021/2022 and 211 in 2022/2023, accounting for an 11.3% decrease relative to 2021/2022. Over the past three years, the Fire and Rescue Service closed a consistent and low number of complaints: four in 2020/2021, three in 2021/2022, and three in 2022/2023.

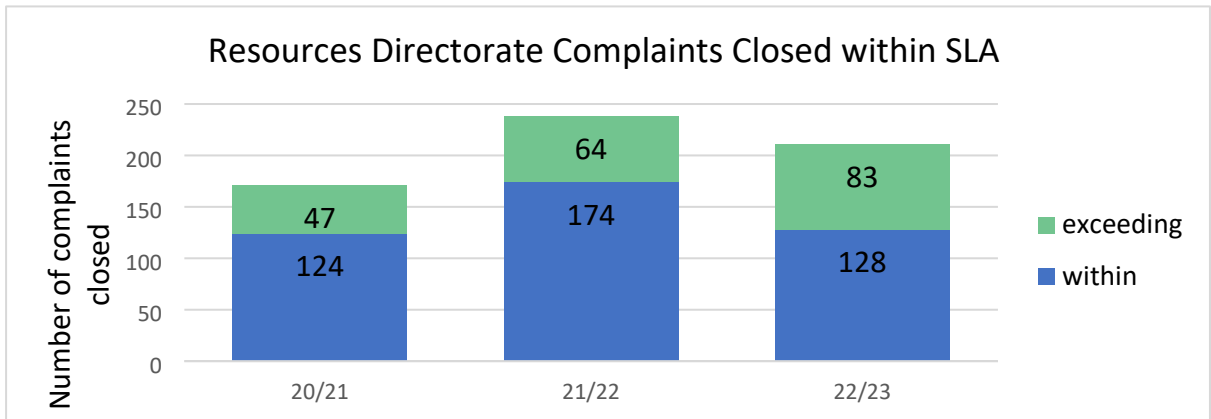


Figure 4: Total Complaints Closed for the Resources Directorate within SLA over time.

3.23 The number of complaints closed within the timescales set out in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) by the Resources Directorate has varied over three years. In 2020/2021, 72.5% (n=124) complaints were closed within SLA, increasing to 73.1% (n=174) in 2021/2022, and reducing to 60.7% (n=128) in 2022/2023, leaving 39.3% (n= 83) complaints exceeding

SLA. To note, the total number of complaints received by the Resources Directorate in 2022/2023 was also lower (n=207) than the previous year. The decrease in performance against SLA was due to staffing issues which are being addressed with the recruitment of additional staff to manage the increased workload.

3.24 From an analysis of 12 stage two cases in 2022/2023 from 21/4/23 this gave further context on this as when CRT are dealing with the stage 2 complaint cases these are often more complex. The analysis showed:

- a) The limitations of the Contact Us system in that the SLA timescales starts from the point the case is logged and not from the actual date the complaint is finally agreed and starts to be investigated. In some instances, the customer takes considerable time to sign off agreed complaints disputing issues and does not respond promptly to requests for clarification of complaint issues to be investigated at stage two.
- b) When the investigation is completed at stage 2, CRT are dependent on the service responding promptly to the actual report. This has also taken longer to be done in some instances due to other competing pressures on officers' time.

The above learning will be considered when the new Customer Platform is implemented later this year.

3.25 For the Fire and Rescue Service, the number of complaints closed within SLA has remained consistent over the last three years, at 100.0% (n=4) 2020/2021, 100.0% (n=3) in 2021/2022 and 100.0% (n=3) in 2022/2023. The number of closed complaints exceeding SLA has remained consistent at 0.0% (n=0) over the past three years.

Remedy

3.26 Closed complaints can be assigned multiple remedies to the same case. Percentages shown are therefore independent of each other relating to the remedies assigned categories, and may not total 100% when combined. In 2020/2021, of the closed complaints in the Resources Directorate (n=171) most were resolved by providing an explanation (65.7%, n=109). Providing a service and apologies accounted for 39.2% (n=65) and 27.7% (n=46), respectively. Less frequent were change in process at 6.0% (n=10), 0.6% (n=1) changes of policy and 1.8% (n=3) financial remedies.

3.27 In 2021/2022, of the closed complaints in the Resources Directorate (n=238), explanations increased to 81.8% (n=180) of all resolved complaints, with apologies also increasing to 35.9%. However, providing a service decreased to 25.5% (n=56), while remedies such as changes in process (5.9%; n=13), financial remedies (2.7%; n=6) and changes of policy (1.4%; n=3) remained less common.

3.28 In 2022/2023, of the closed complaints in the Resources Directorate (n=211), the most common remedy remained providing an explanation at 74.7% (n=124). Apologies increased to 41.6% (n=69) and providing a service increased to 34.3% (n=57). Less common remedies included changes in processes (4.8%; n=8), financial remedies (4.8%; n=8) and changes of policies (1.8%; n=3).

3.29 The most common remedy in the Fire and Rescue Service was ‘explanation provided’ accounting for the majority (n=2) of complaint remedies in 2022/2023.

Outcome

3.30 In 2022/2023 the most common outcome for closed complaints within the Resources Directorate was Unknown (21.3%; n=45). All services have been reminded of the need to complete all data fields on the system. The second most common outcome was Complaint: Not Upheld (20.4%; n=43) and thirdly, Complaint: Partially Upheld (17.1%; n=36) (Figure 8). The remaining 41.2% accounts for the other complaint outcomes.

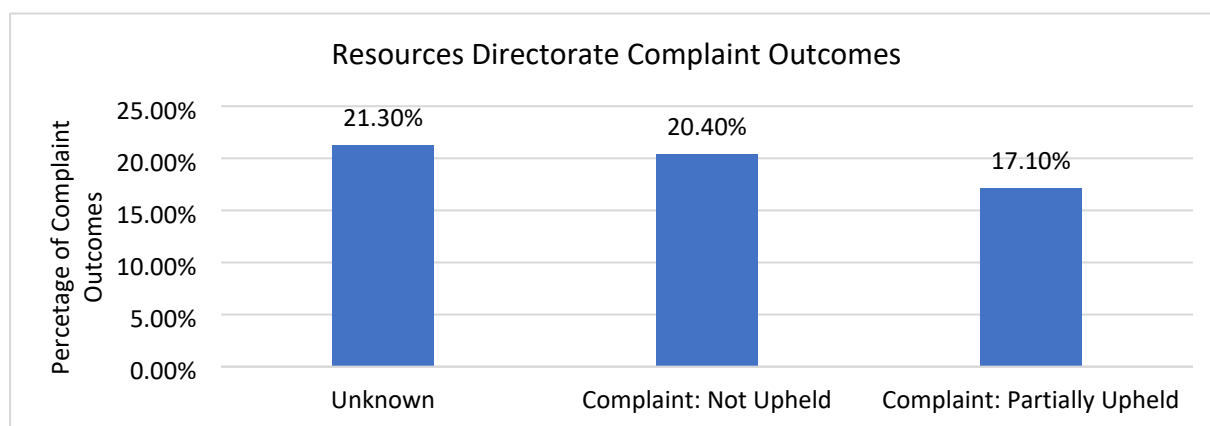


Figure 5: Top 3 Complaint Outcomes for the Resources Directorate in 22/23.

3.31 Within the Fire and Rescue Service, the most common outcome for closed complaint cases since 2020/2021 has been Question: Answered, with 66.7% (n=2) of complaints assigned to this outcome in 2022/2023. This was followed by Complaint: Deemed to be Withdrawn (33.3%; n=1) (Figure 5).

Lessons Learned

3.32 When a complaint, question, comment, or compliment is completed and closed, colleagues have some mandatory fields to complete. One of these fields is ‘Lessons Learned.’ This is an opportunity for staff to reflect on how that case could have been prevented/gone better and we, as a Council, can improve with future cases. This is then used for learning and training purposes not only the team which has handled the case, but also for the wider Council. The Customer Relations Team encourage colleagues to complete this section as in depth as they can, so that we can be more specific when reviewing how we can do better.

3.33 In 2022/2023, 30.3% (n=64) of closed complaints within the Resources Directorate had recorded lessons learned, with 7.1% (n=15) related to organisation processes and 7.1% (n=15) were related to improving communication. The Fire and Rescue Service had 100% (n=3) of closed complaints with recorded lessons, but no key themes were identified.

Compliments, Comments and Questions

3.34 In 2022/2023, compliments, comments and questions made up 46.8% (n=182) of the total cases assigned to the Resources Directorate through Contact Us, this is a 32.8% decrease from 2021/2022. Among these cases 89.0% (n=162) were related to questions, while 8.2% (n=15) were comments and 2.7% (n=5) were compliments.

3.35 For the Fire and Rescue Service, in 2022/2023, 86.4% (n=19) of total cases were compliments, comments and questions, which was a 64.8% decrease compared to 2021/2022. Of these, 89.5% (n=17) were questions, 5.3% (n=1) were compliments and the remaining 5.3% (n=1) were comments (Table 4).

2022/23	Resources Directorate		Fire and Rescue	
	Number of cases	%	Number of cases	%
Compliments	5	2.7%	1	5.3%
Comments	15	8.2%	1	5.3%
Questions	162	89.0%	17	89.5%

Table 4: Compliments, Comments and Questions for the Resources Directorate and Fire and Rescue in 22/23.

3.36 In 2020/2021, the Resources Directorate received 321 comments, questions and compliments. Of that number, 75.1% (n=241) were closed within SLA, while 24.9% (n=80) exceeded SLA. In 2021/2022, the number of comments, questions and compliments decreased to 271 and 85.2% (n=231) were closed within SLA, leaving 14.8% (n=40) exceeding. In 2022/2023, the total decreased to 182 comments, questions and compliments were received, with 87.4% closed within SLA, 11.5% exceeded and 1.1% were not closed.

3.37 For the Fire and Rescue Service in 2020/2021, 44 comments, questions and compliments were received, with 100% closed within SLA. In 2021/2022, the number of comments, questions and compliments increased to 54 and 98.1% (n=53) were closed within SLA leaving 1.9% (n=1) exceeding. The following year, 2022/2023, decreased with 19 comments, questions and compliments received. 87.4% (n=18) closed within SLA, 5.3% (n=1) exceeded.

3.38 Many compliments go directly to the service or individual's emails; therefore, many do not get logged on to Contact Us. This is an area we are working on with the teams as we would like to celebrate and learn from these compliments widely within the organisation. Service areas have shared examples of compliments received directly, which can be found in Appendix 1, however this is not included within Contact Us data reporting. Appendix 1 gives examples of compliments received through Contact Us and directly by teams.

Customer Platform

3.39 In January 2023 Cabinet agreed the Microsoft Technology Platform (Dynamics) would be used to replace the existing customer relationship management system (Firmstep) solution. This is a significant change which will help to address some of the weaknesses in data, recording and insight about customer feedback set out in this report.

3.40 A single customer platform for the Council allows:

- direct 1-to-1 communication with citizens so they can view and easily understand where they are in any process with us;

- a single view of the citizen;
- consistent and quality data collection and analytics accessible to our reporting tools; and
- simple and repeatable digitisation for those able to use it.

3.40 The first release of the customer platform, currently planned for August 2023, includes Customer Feedback including complaints. There will be a single customer platform which would allow officers to view the full history of citizen interaction and actions taken previously. This would allow officers to access a fuller record of contact, to provide a more joined up response. Further releases of the Customer Platform to modernise our digital services are planned throughout the financial year.

3.41 It is important that the Council has an effective and efficient customer feedback system in place which ensures that:

- we will actively listen and respond empathetically and professionally to concerns, complaints or queries from members of the public and we will work with colleagues to provide the best response within the timescales determined by the appropriate complaints procedure, by working with the service area to achieve this;
- complaints and compliments are accurately recorded, which leads to accurate performance data being produced to drive improvement;
- when things have gone wrong, they are put right as quickly as possible ;
- both complainants and staff understand the relevant complaints procedure, how it relates to them and their rights and responsibilities within it;
- any learning from complaints is acknowledged and that the Customer Relations Team, work with the appropriate service area to ensure that the necessary changes are made to improve services provided; and
- high quality and timely performance reporting is provided to management teams, to ensure that they are aware of issues arising and can work with the Customer Relations Team to resolve these and maintain a high-quality service.

3.42 Over time, the customer platform will provide a foundation for the careful application of automation and artificial intelligence technologies to enhance customer experience. This will help meet increasing demand, provide greater consistency and assurance about process, and support the Council's challenging financial position.

4 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The Customer Platform funding was approved by Cabinet on 27th January 2023.

5 Environmental Implications

There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

6. Supporting Information

Not Applicable

7. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

Not Applicable

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Compliment Examples

Background Papers

None

	Name	Contact Information
Report Author	Sue Parks- Quality Standards and Business Improvement Officer Nadja Willinger – Business Intelligence Analyst	sueparks@warwickshire.gov.uk businessintelligence@warwickshire.gov.uk
Assistant Director	Kushal Birla - Assistant Director for Business and Customer Services	kushalbirla@warwickshire.gov.uk
Strategic Director	Rob Powell- Strategic Director for Resources	robpowell@warwickshire.gov.uk
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Dahmash Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation	yousefdahmash@warwickshire.gov.uk

The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Portfolio Holders: Councillors Dahmash and Crump