



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2024/25

Contents

	Page
Introduction.....	3
Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure	3
Public Information and Accessibility	4
Complaints Information and Organisational Learning	5
Overview of Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments.....	5
Chief Executive	9
Operations Group.....	12
People Group.....	22
Services Group.....	28
Overall Council Performance against the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure	47
Further Recommendations.....	50
Performance against Local Performance Indicators	50

Introduction

1. This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2024/25 under the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the corporate procedure). The purpose of the report is to identify topics and trends in relation to complaints; identify areas of organisational learning that have taken place over the past year as a result of the complaints received and make further recommendations based on trend and performance data to improve services. The report also highlights those areas of good practice within the Council and seeks to identify topics and trends in relation to comments made by members of the public, so the Council can also take action where appropriate to improve services.
2. In addition to the statistical information presented in this report, it is important to recognise the work of the Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team that underpins this in terms of promoting an organisational culture in which complaints are recognised, accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently and as close to the point of service delivery as possible.

Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

3. In February 2024 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) issued its Complaints Handling Code (the Code) as “advice and guidance” for all local councils in England under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974. The LGSCO encouraged to adopt the Code as soon as they are able to do so. The LGSCO intend to start considering the Code as part of their processes from April 2026 at the earliest to give councils the opportunity to adopt the Code successfully into working practices. The Code only applies to complaints where there is no statutory process in place.
4. The Council reviewed its procedure prior to 1 April 2024 to ensure it is compliant with the Code. The corporate procedure sets out how the Council will deal with all complaints, compliments and comments received with the exception of those where there is a statutory process in place i.e. adult and children’s social care services, public health, some social housing complaints and Members complaints.
5. The corporate procedure has two stages. Stage 1 is a local resolution stage where we try to resolve those complaints that cannot be resolved immediately as part of our day to day business. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with locally, that is within the service being complained about. We aim to resolve the majority of complaints at Stage 1 of the corporate procedure.
6. Stage 2 is a formal investigation stage where complaints will usually be investigated by the Council’s Complaints Investigator, the Complaints and Information Governance Manager or another officer independent of the service being complained about.
7. If the complainant remains dissatisfied following a Stage 2 investigation they may refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Public Information and Accessibility

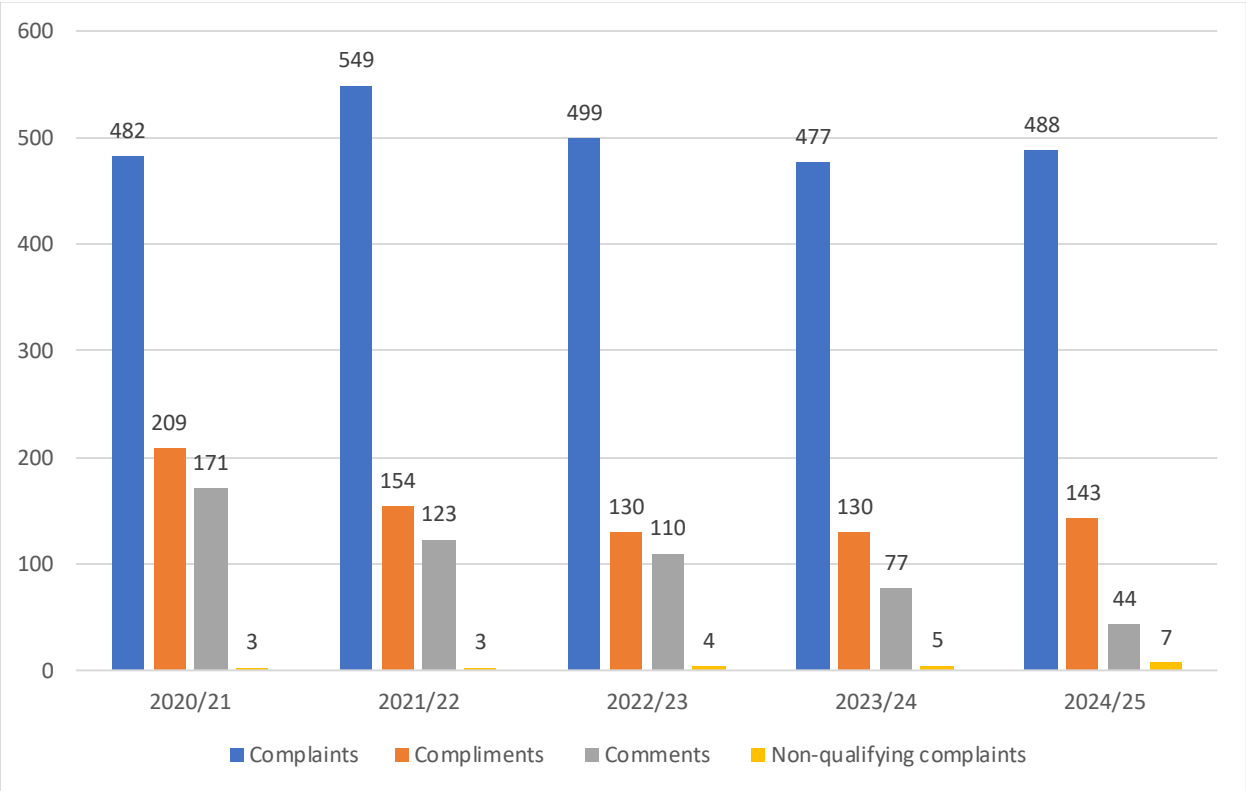
8. We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible, information is available on the Council's website which contains an electronic form people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
9. We have also produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.
10. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Complaints Information and Organisational Learning

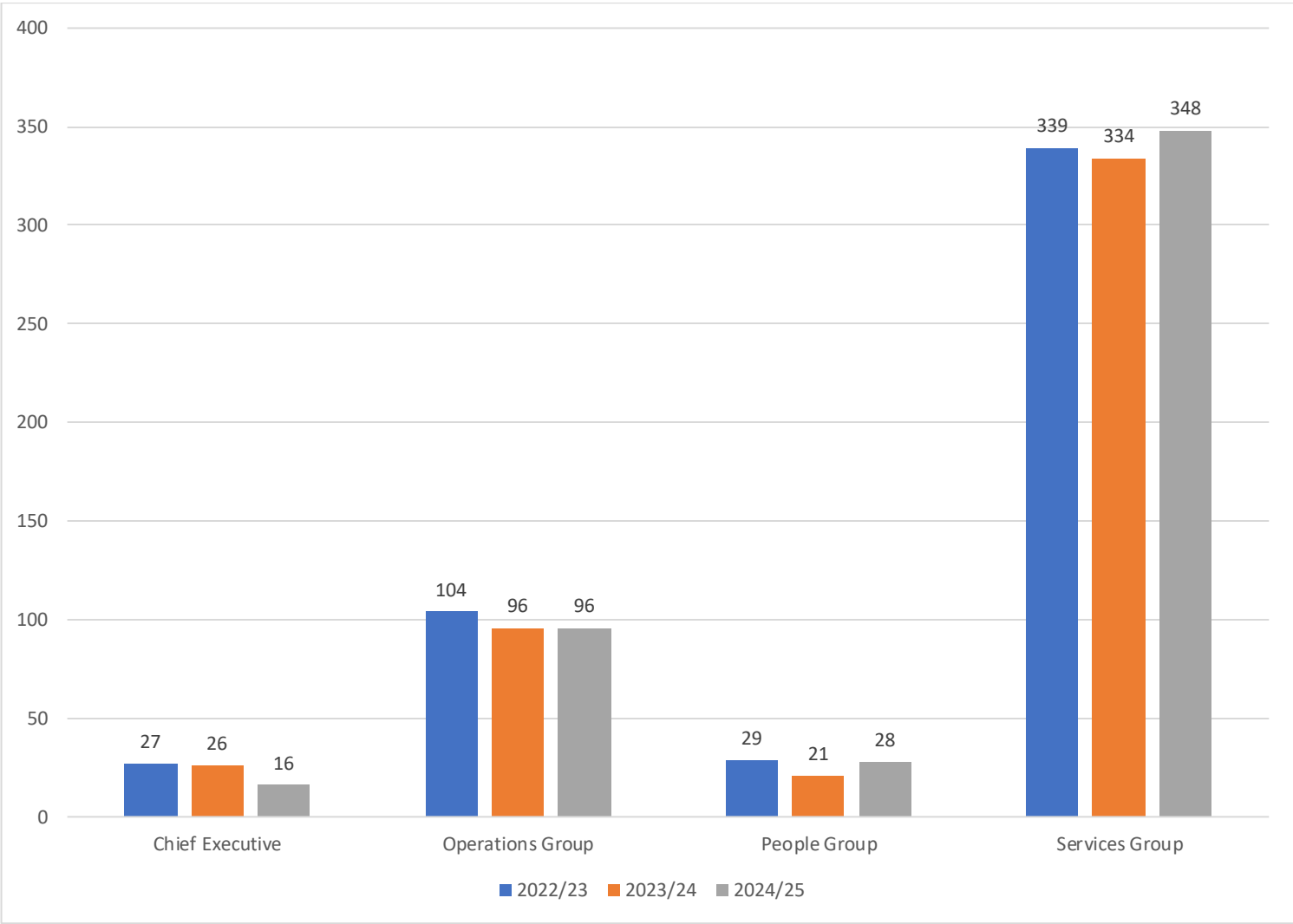
Overview of Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments

- 11. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 the Council received a total of 682 representations under the corporate procedure, a decrease from 689 in 2023/24.
- 12. The Council received 488 corporate complaints in 2024/25, an increase from 477 in 2023/24. 467 complaints were initially dealt with at Stage 1 of the corporate procedure, whilst 21 were escalated directly to Stage 2. 52 Stage 1 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 following a Stage 1 investigation. In total 73 complaints were investigated at Stage 2, a decrease from 84 in 2023/24.
- 13. The Council received 143 corporate compliments in 2024/25, an increase from 130 in 2023/24.
- 14. The Council received 44 corporate comments in 2024/25, a reduction from 77 in 2023/24.
- 15. The Council also received seven non-qualifying corporate complaints in 2024/25, an increase from five in 2023/24.

Total Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments

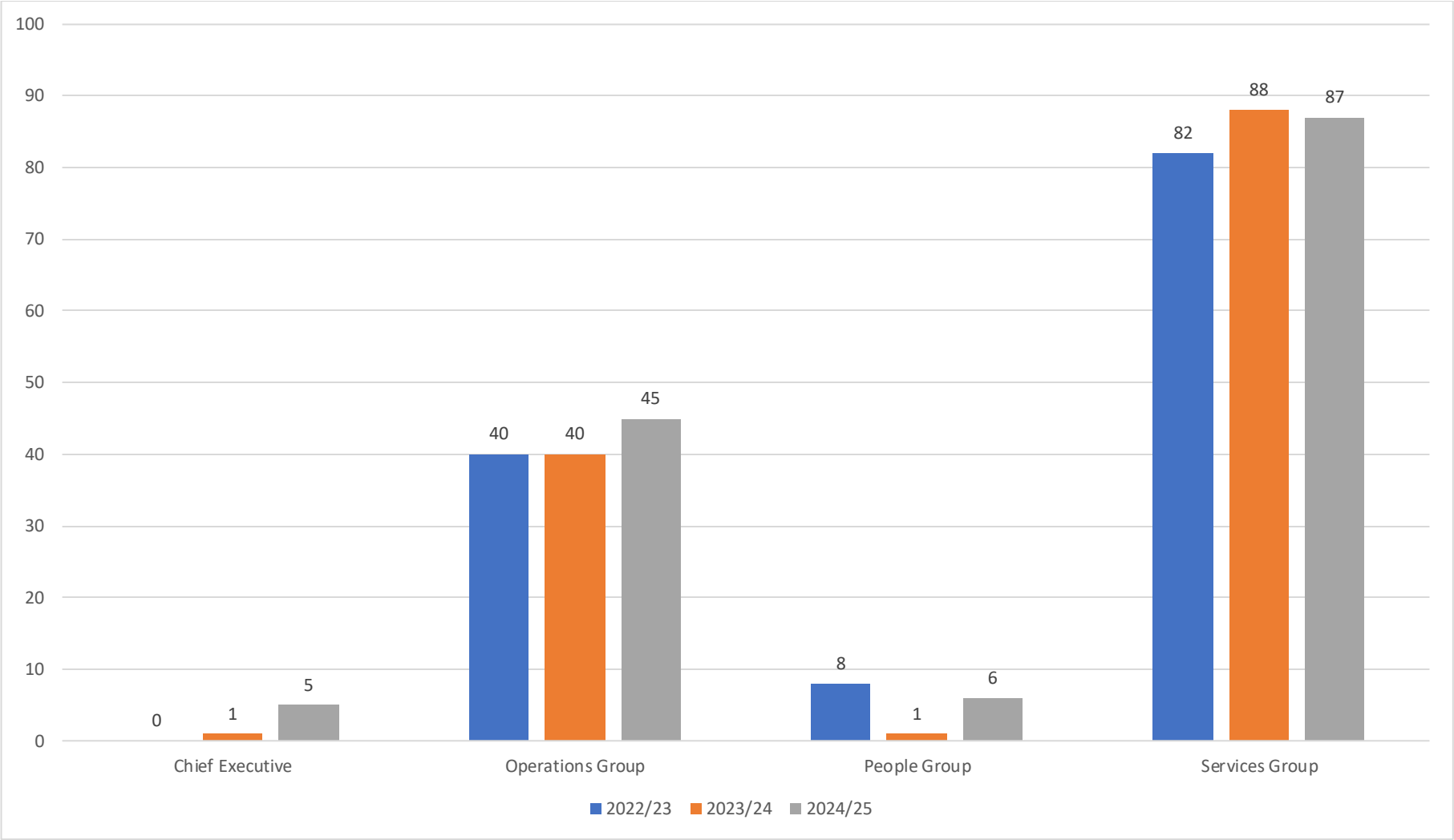


Corporate Complaints by Department



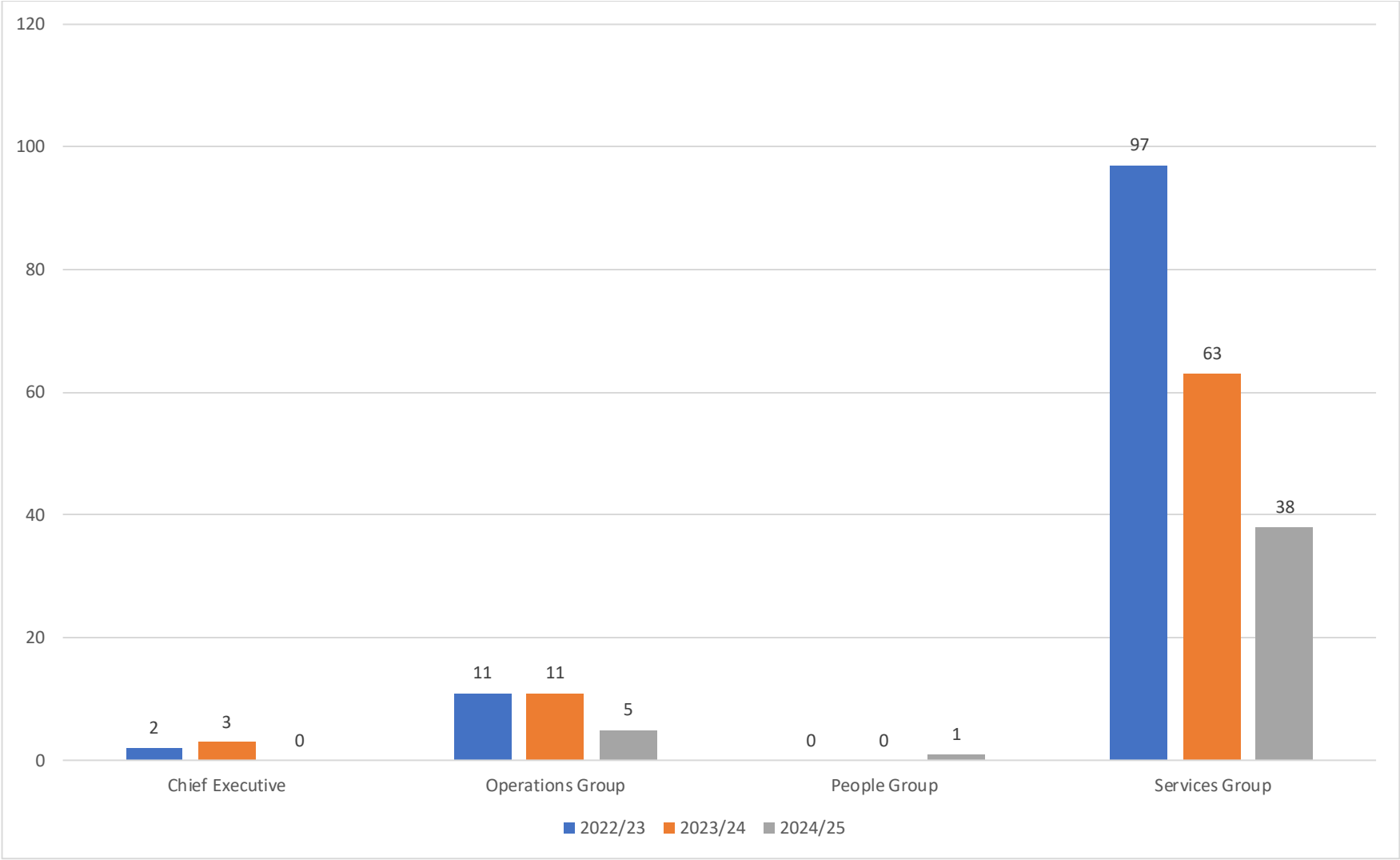
N.B. Direct comparison data is not available prior to 2022/23 due to the change in the Council’s organisational structure.

Corporate Compliments by Department



N.B. Direct comparison data is not available prior to 2022/23 due to the change in the Council’s organisational structure.

Corporate Comments by Department

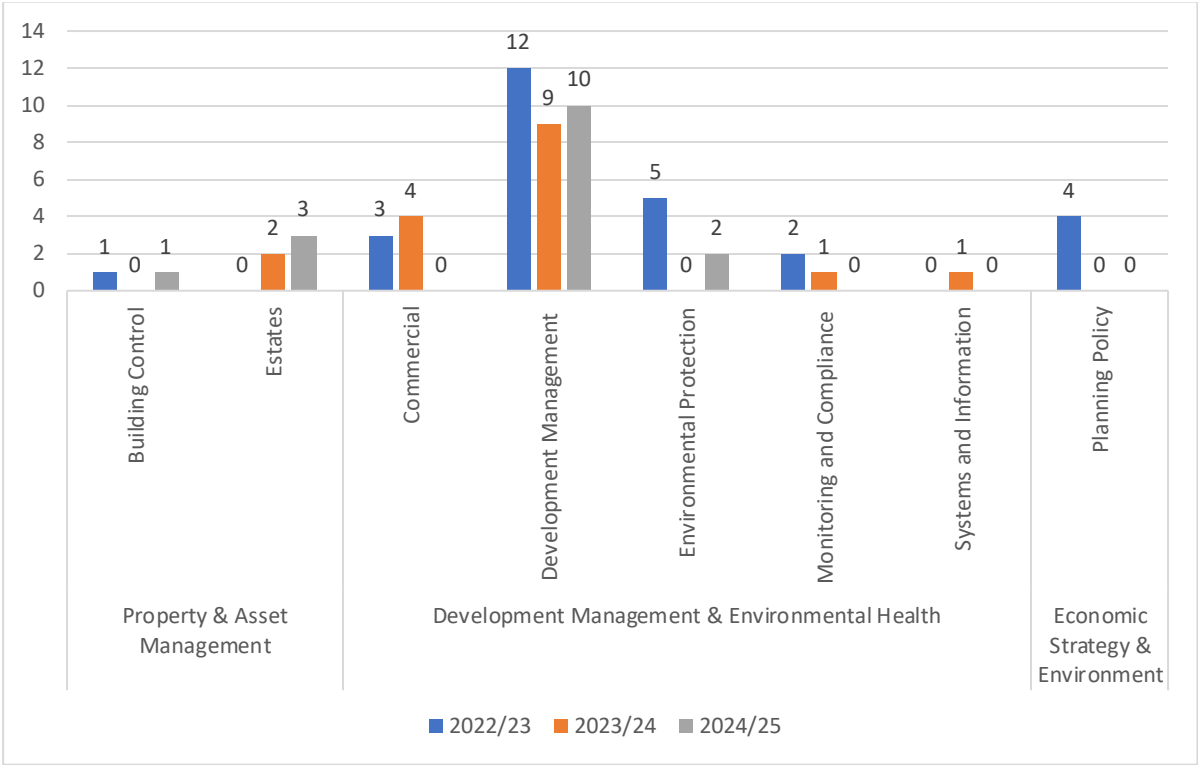


N.B. Direct comparison data is not available prior to 2022/23 due to the change in the Council’s organisational structure.

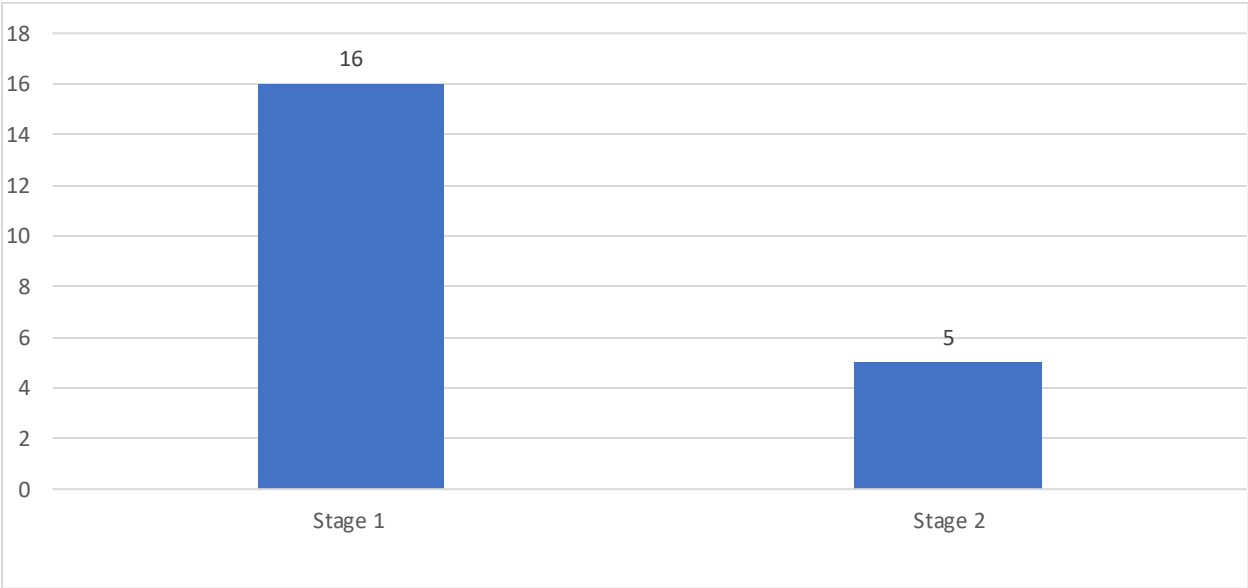
Complaints, Compliments and Comments by Department

Chief Executive
Complaints by Service Area/Team

16. Chief Executive received 16 corporate complaints during 2024/25, a decrease from 17 in 2023/24.



Complaints by Stage



Compliments by Service Area/Team

18. Chief Executive received five compliments, two for Commercial and three for Environmental Protection, an increase from one for Building Control in 2023/24.

Comments by Service Area/Team

19. Chief Executive received zero comments, a decrease from three in 2023/24.

Complaints by Outcome

20. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2024/25.

Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Estates	1	0	0	0	1	2
Building Control	0	0	0	0	1	1
Development Management	0	8	1	1	0	10
Commercial	0	0	0	1	0	1
Environmental Protection	0	0	1	0	1	2
Totals	1	8	2	2	3	16

Stage 2 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Development Management	0	5	1	0	0	6
Systems and Information	0	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	0	5	2	0	0	7

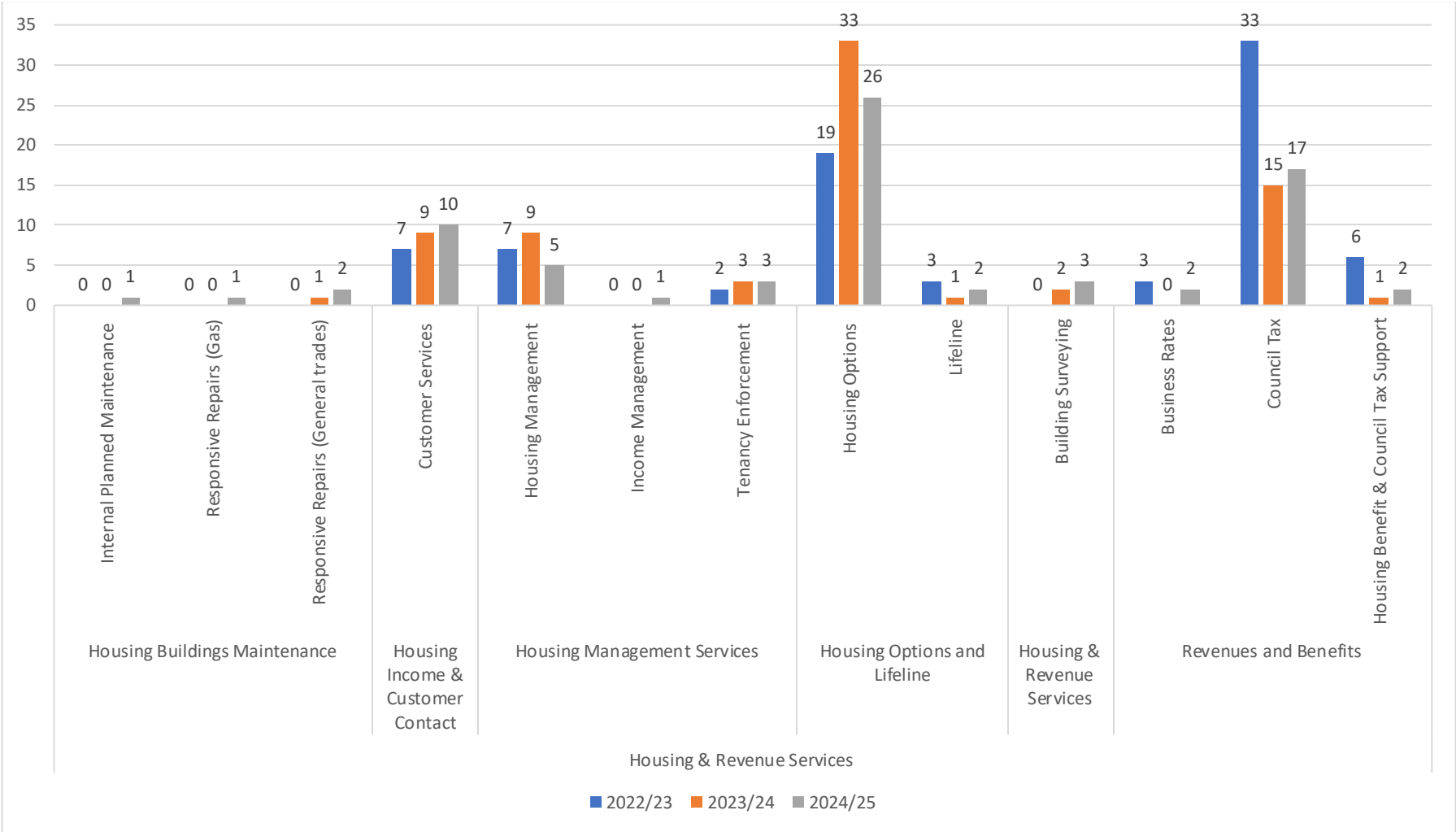
Organisational Learning

21. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of corporate complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, the following organisational learning resulted from the complaint investigations concluded during 2024/25.
22. Following a complaint for Systems and Information, the Council corrected its website to indicate when maintenance tasks may affect the availability of the public access section of the website, which allows people to view planning applications on-line.

Operations Group

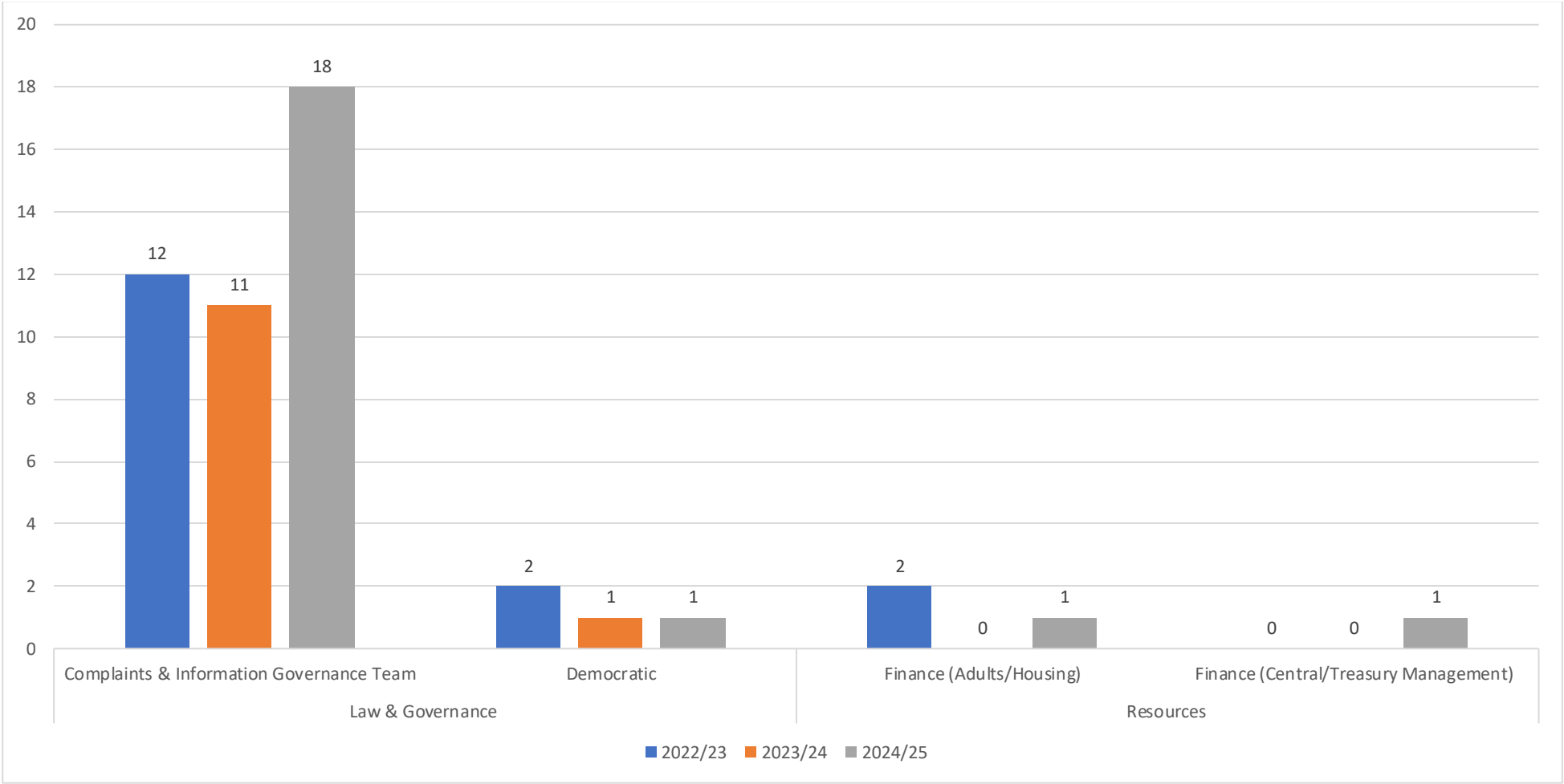
Complaints by Service Area/Team

32. Operations Group received 96 corporate complaints during 2024/25.



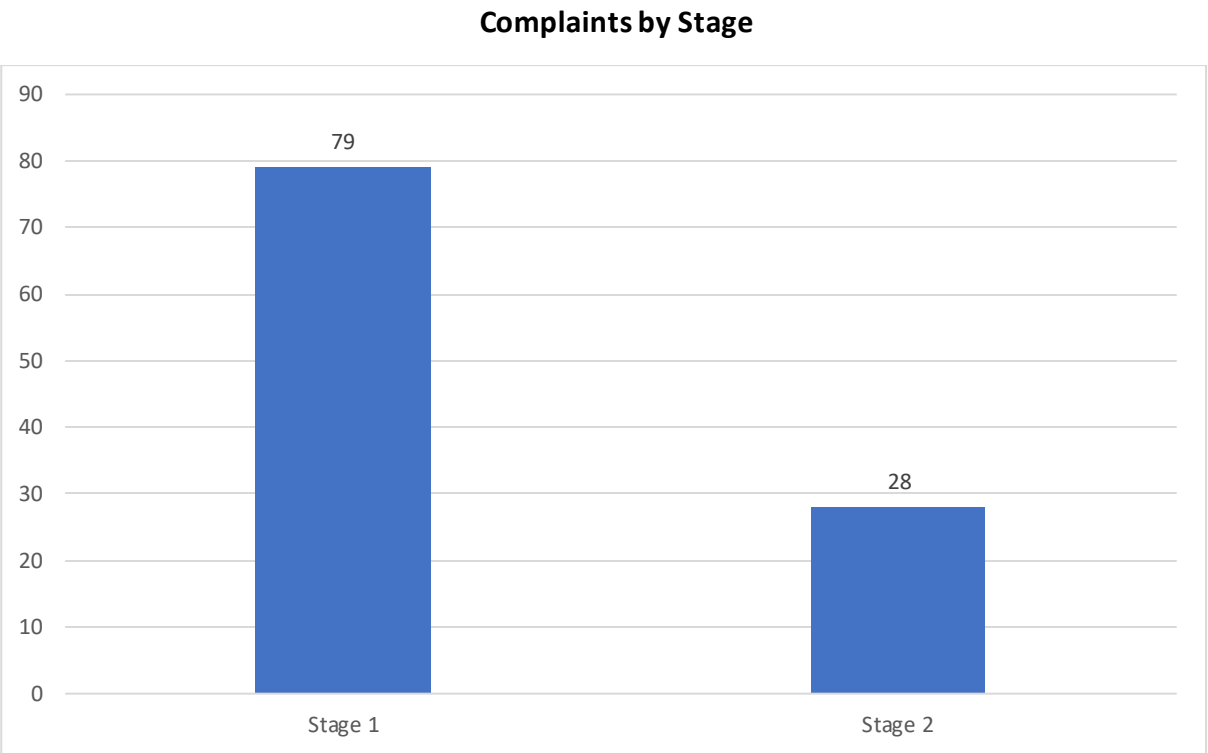
33. Internal Planned Maintenance received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
34. Responsive Repairs (Gas) received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
35. Responsive Repairs (General Trades) received two corporate complaints during 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.
36. Customer Services received 10 corporate complaints during 2024/25, an increase from nine in 2023/24. Six complaints concerned the delays in the application process for Blue Badges, a decrease from seven complaints about this issue in 2023/24.
37. Housing Management received five corporate complaints in 2024/25, a decrease from nine during 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
38. Income Management received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
39. Tenancy Enforcement received three corporate complaints in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24. All three complaints concerned a lack of action in relation to neighbour nuisance issues.
40. Housing Options received 26 corporate complaints during 2024/25, a decrease from 33 in 2023/24. Complaints concerned people's dissatisfaction with their eligibility/banding, the kinds of properties they were able to bid on, not being allowed to bid due to rent arrears, the level of support provided and poor communication.
41. Lifeline received two corporate complaints in 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.
42. Building Surveying received three corporate complaints during 2024/25, an increase from two in 2023/24. All three complaints concerned a lack of communication in relation to works to neighbouring Council properties.
43. Business Rates received two complaints in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
44. Council Tax received 17 complaints in 2024/25, an increase from 15 in 2023/24. Communication remained the most common cause of complaint.
45. Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support received two complaints in 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.

Operations continued...



1.

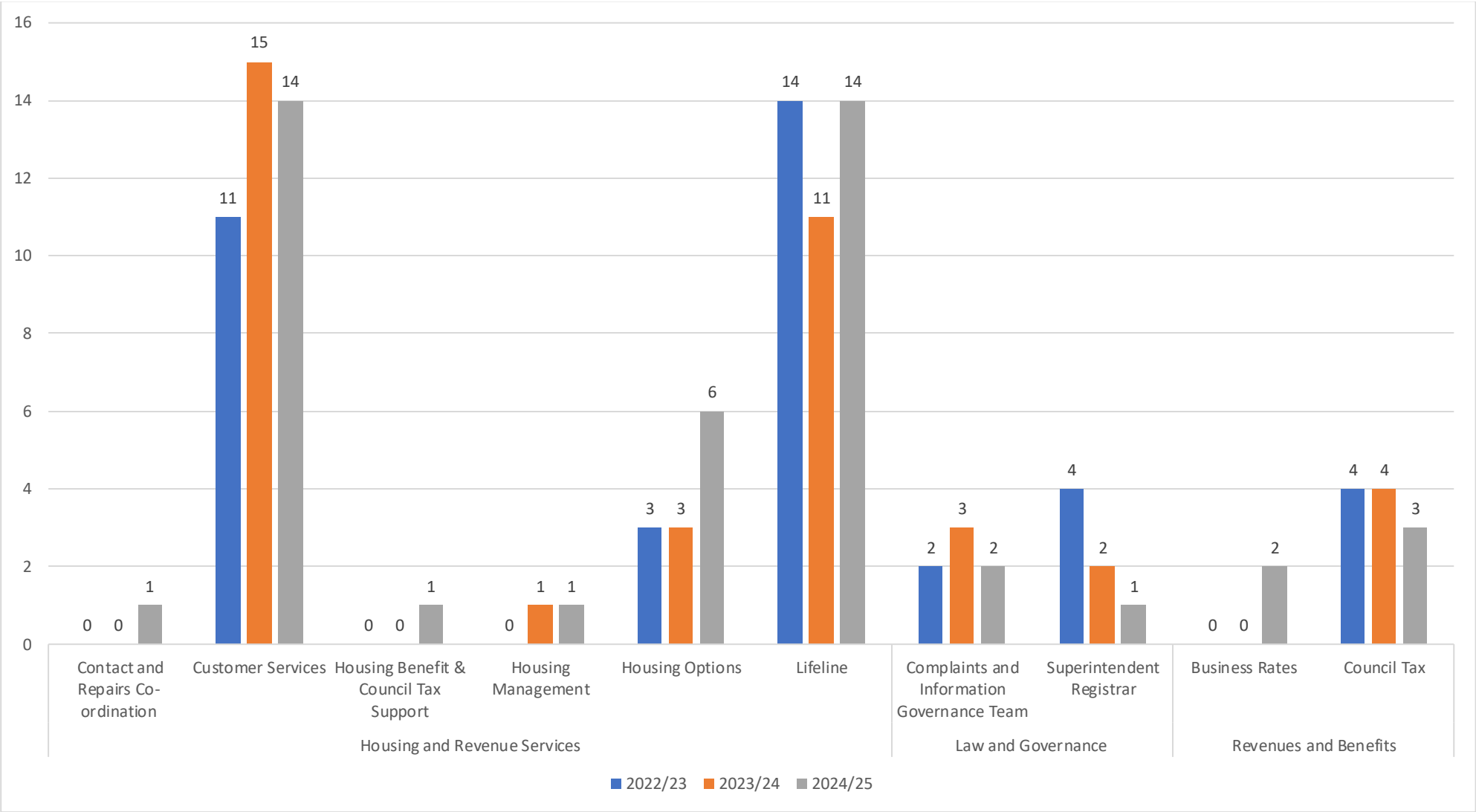
- 46. Complaints and Information Governance Team received 18 complaints, an increase from 11 in 2023/24. The most common theme was people’s dissatisfaction with the timeliness and/or content of the response to their Subject Access Request (SAR).
- 47. Democratic received one complaint in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
- 48. Finance (Adults/Housing) received one corporate complaint in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 49. Finance (Central/Treasury Management) received one corporate complaint in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.



N.B. 17 complaints were escalated directly to Stage 2

Compliments by Service Area/Team

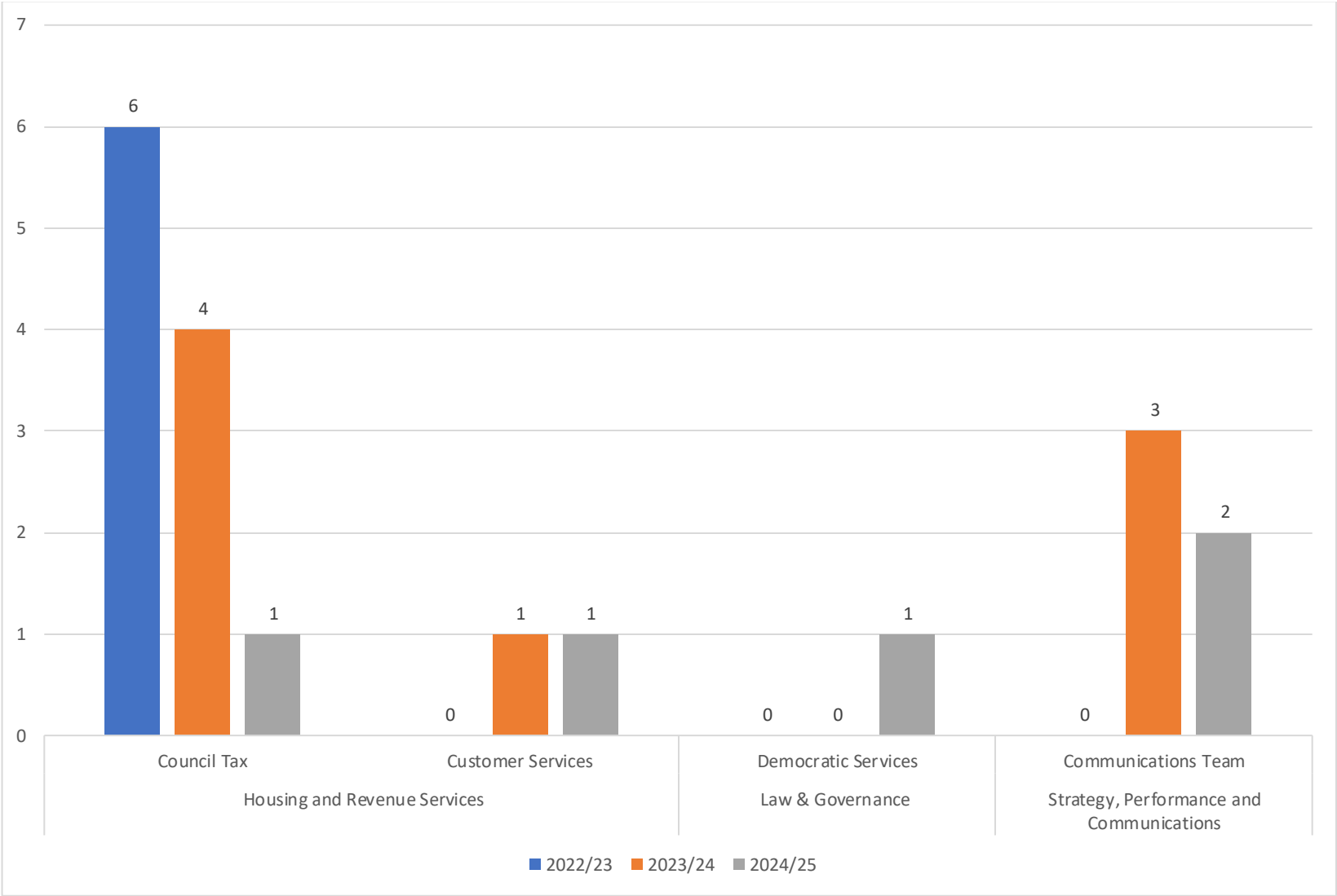
50. Operations Group received 45 corporate compliments during 2024/25.



51. Contact and Repairs Co-ordination received one corporate compliment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
52. Customer Services received 14 corporate compliments in 2024/25, a slight decrease from 15 during 2023/24. The main themes were people's satisfaction with the service provided and assistance in applying for Blue Badges.
53. Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support received one compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
54. Housing Management received one corporate compliment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
55. Housing Options received six corporate compliments in 2024/25, an increase from three in 2023/24.
56. Lifeline received 14 corporate compliments during 2024/25, an increase from 11 in 2023/24. The main theme was people's satisfaction with the service provided, particularly in relation to staff responding to incidents.
57. Complaints and Information Governance Team received two compliments during 2024/25, a decrease from three in 2023/24.
58. Superintendent Registrar received one compliment during 2024/25, a decrease from two in 2023/24.
59. Council Tax received three compliments in 2024/25, a decrease from four in 2023/24.

Comments by Service Area/Team

60. Operations Group received five corporate comments during 2024/25.



32. Council Tax received one comment, a decrease from four in 2023/24.
33. Customer Services received one corporate comment during 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
34. Democratic Services received one comment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
35. Communications Team received two comments during 2024/25, a decrease from three in 2023/24.

Complaints by Outcome

36. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2024/25.

Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Escalated to Stage 2 no Stage 1 Response	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Communications Team	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Complaints and Information Governance Team	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Finance (Central/Treasury Management)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Finance (Adults/Housing)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Customer Services	0	0	1	0	1	9	11
Income Management	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Housing Management	0	0	2	1	1	1	5
Tenancy Enforcement	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
Housing Options	0	2	11	4	2	4	23
Lifeline	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Business Rates	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Council Tax	0	0	11	1	4	1	17
Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
General trades	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Internal Planned Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Building Surveying	1	0	0	2	1	0	4
Totals	2	2	31	11	12	20	78

Stage 2 Outcomes

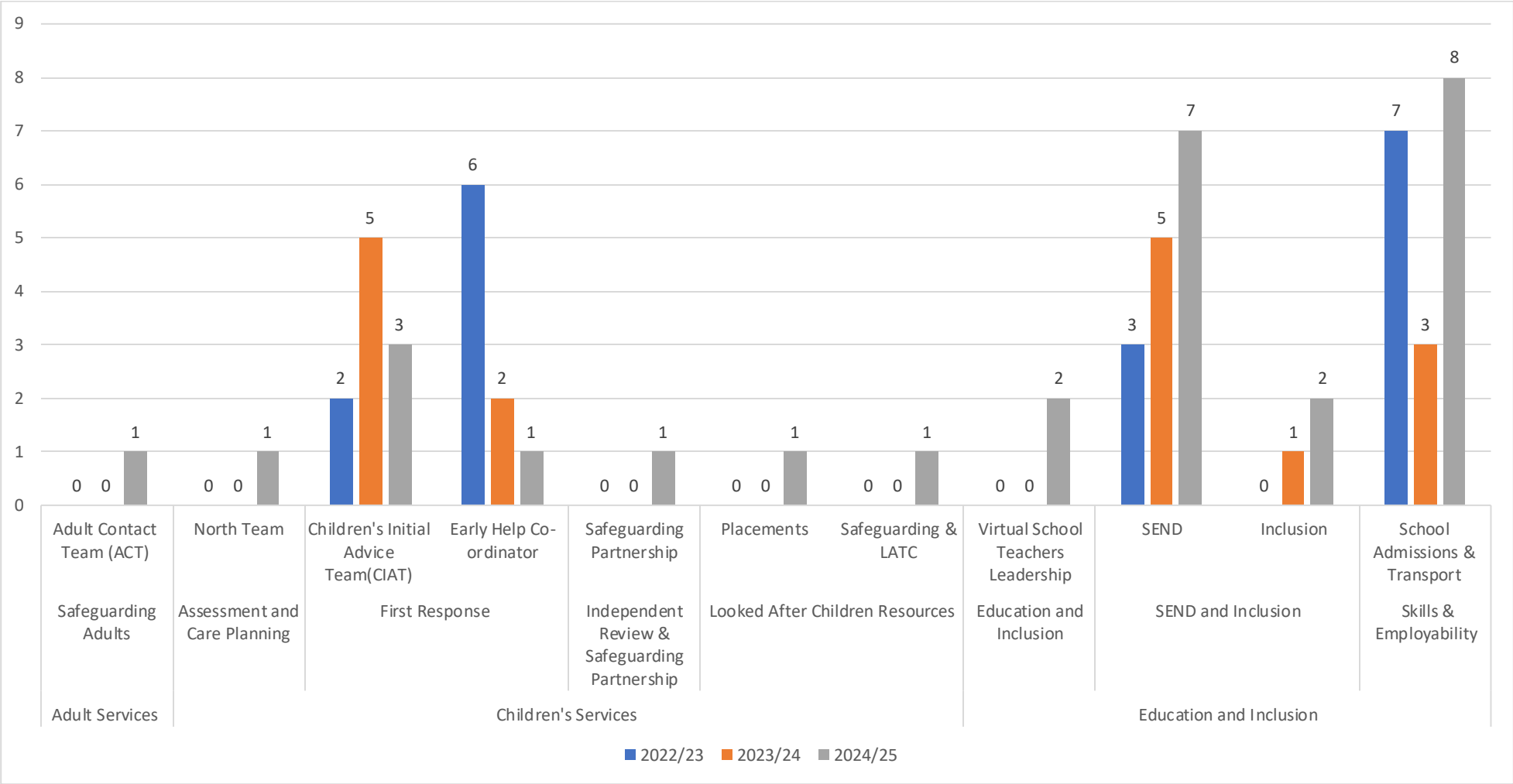
Service Area/Team	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Complaints and Information Governance Team	4	3	9	1	17
Democratic	1	0	0	0	1
Superintendent Registrar	0	1	0	0	1
Housing Options	3	2	0	0	5
Lifeline	0	1	0	0	1
Council Tax	1	2	1	0	4
Totals	9	9	10	1	29

Organisational learning

37. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, the following organisational learning resulted from the complaint investigations concluded during 2024/25.
38. Following a complaint for Housing Options, the Council made sure officers making decisions on housing applications are clear, that in accordance with the Housing Services Allocations Policy 2023 – 2028, they cannot consider spent convictions as part of the assessment process.
39. Following another complaint for Housing Options, it was agreed that in accordance with the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, the Housing Options service would incorporate the duty to refer into their wider homelessness strategy and joint working arrangements and establish local arrangements with agencies in regard to referrals.
40. Following a complaint for Lifeline, it was agreed staff would be instructed to ensure that the proper checks are undertaken to avoid incorrect contact details being recorded in a customer's records. It was also agreed the new telecare agreement will show the client's contact number so they can check the information provided is correct. Lifeline officers were also reminded to ensure they discuss the most appropriate place to locate the Lifeline unit with the customer and explain any rationale if they propose to re-locate it.

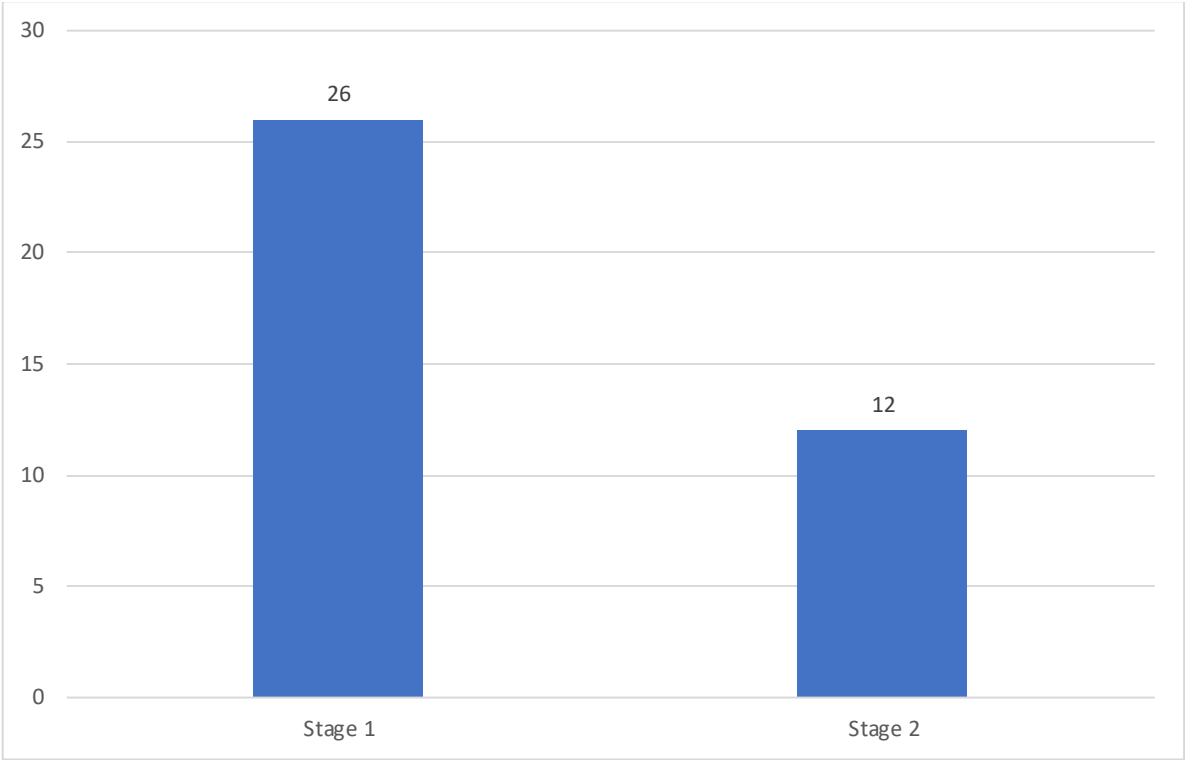
People Group
Complaints by Service Area/Team

41. People Group received 28 corporate complaints during 2024/25.



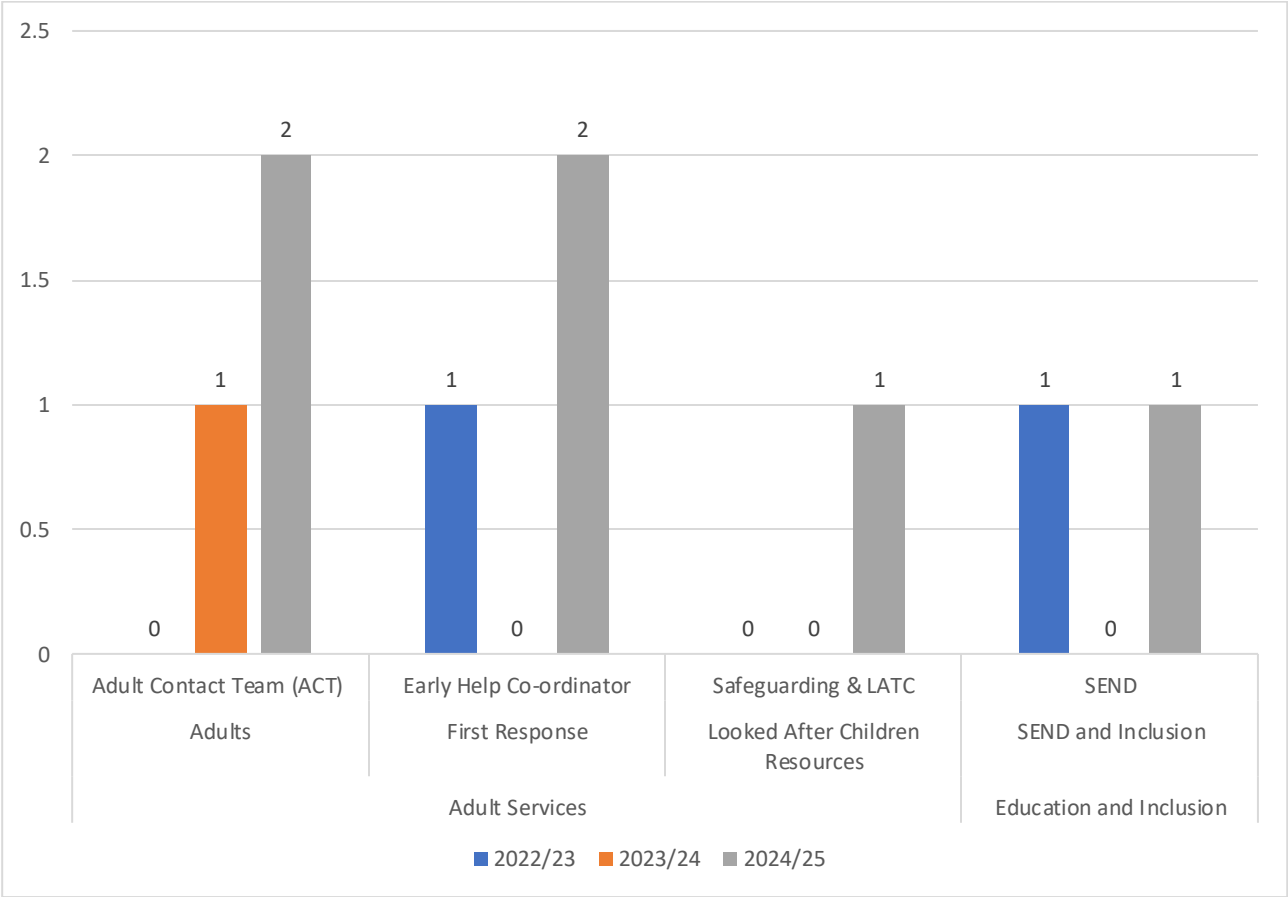
42. Adult Contact Team (ACT) received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
43. North Team received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
44. Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) received three corporate complaints in 2024/25, a decrease from five in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes in the complaints received.
45. Early Help Co-ordinator received one corporate complaint in 2024/25, a decrease from two in 2023/24.
46. Safeguarding Partnership received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
47. Placements received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
48. Safeguarding & Looked After Through Care (LATC) received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
49. Virtual School Teachers Leadership received two complaints during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
50. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) received seven complaints during 2024/25, an increase from five in 2023/24. Delays in securing the provision outlined in EHC Plans was an identifiable theme.
51. Inclusion received two complaints during 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.
52. School Admissions & Transport received eight complaints during 2024/25, an increase from three in 2023/24. The most common cause of complaint was dissatisfaction with the school transport service provided.

Complaints by Stage



N.B. Two complaints were escalated directly to Stage 2

Compliments by Service Area/Team



- 53. Adult Contact Team (ACT) received two corporate compliments in 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.
- 54. Early Help Co-ordinator received two corporate compliments during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 55. Safeguarding & Looked After Through Care (LATC) received one corporate compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 56. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) received one compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Comments by Service Area/Team

- 57. SEND received one comment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Complaints by Outcome

58. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2024/25.

Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Adult Contact Team	0	0	0	0	1	1
Safeguarding Partnership	0	1	0	0	0	1
Early Help Co-ordinator	0	1	0	0	0	1
Children's Initial Advice Team	0	0	1	1	0	2
North Team	0	1	0	0	0	1
SEND	0	3	2	0	1	6
Inclusion	0	1	0	2	0	3
School Admissions & Transport	0	5	2	1	0	8
Virtual School Teachers Leadership	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	0	12	5	5	2	24

Stage 2 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) at the Front Door	0	0	0	1	0	1
Early Help Co-ordinator	0	0	1	0	0	1
Placements	0	0	0	1	0	1
Safeguarding & LATC	0	1	0	0	0	1
SEND	0	1	4	0	0	5
Inclusion	0	0	1	1	0	2
School Admissions & Transport	0	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	0	2	7	3	0	12

Organisational learning

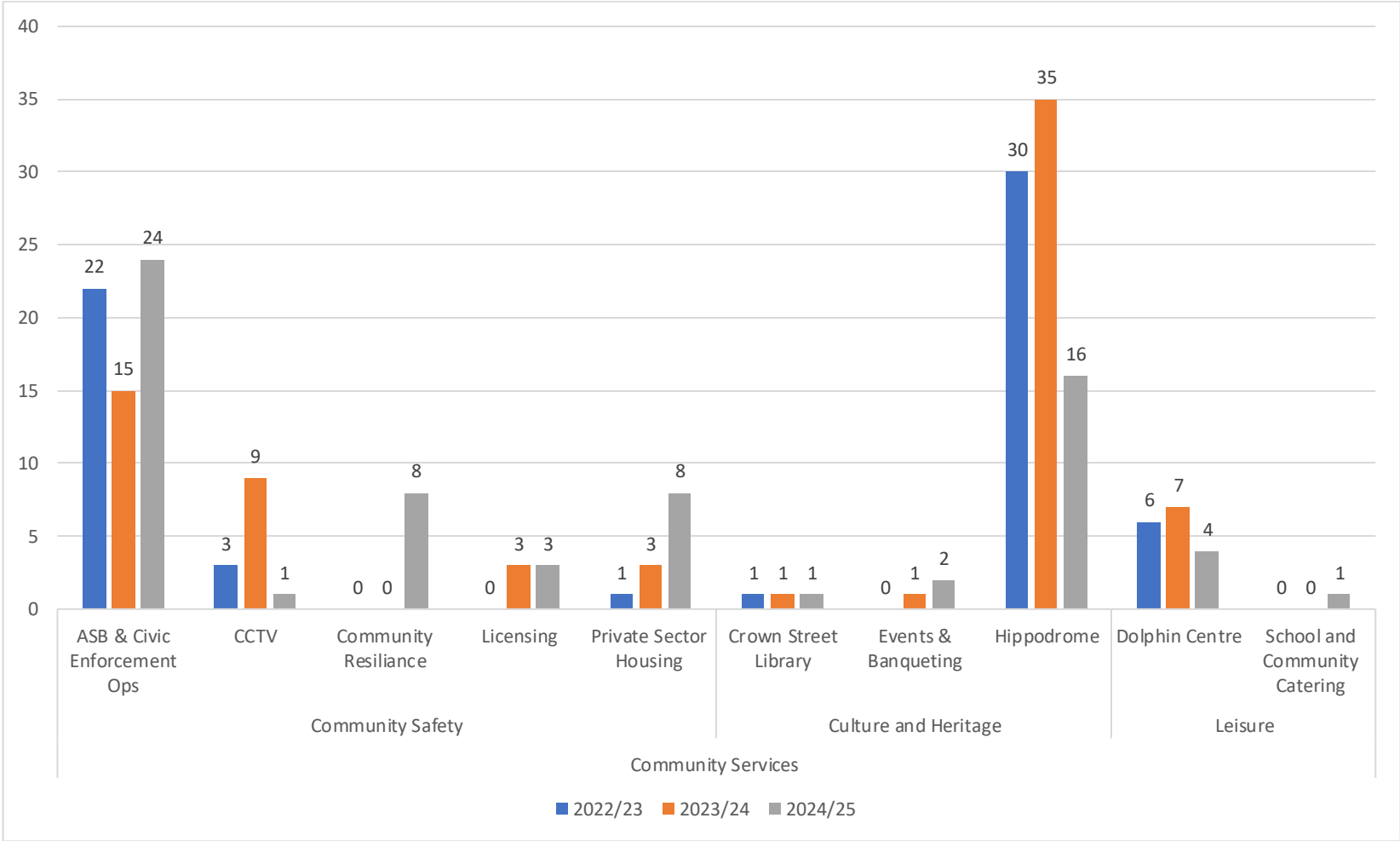
59. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, the following organisational learning resulted from the complaint investigations concluded during 2024/25.
60. Following a complaint for Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) staff were reminded of the importance of Adult and Children's Services sharing information. Training was also provided on the Local Authority's duties under the Mental Health Act 1983 and the Children with Disabilities Eligibility Criteria.
61. Following a complaint for Inclusion the Vulnerable Pupil Panel Protocol was updated with regard to the Home to Hospital Teaching Service. The Council also reviewed its internal processes to ensure it is able make timely arrangements for the provision of suitable education in accordance with its duties under Section 19(1) of the Education Act 1996.

Services Group

Complaints by Service Area/Team

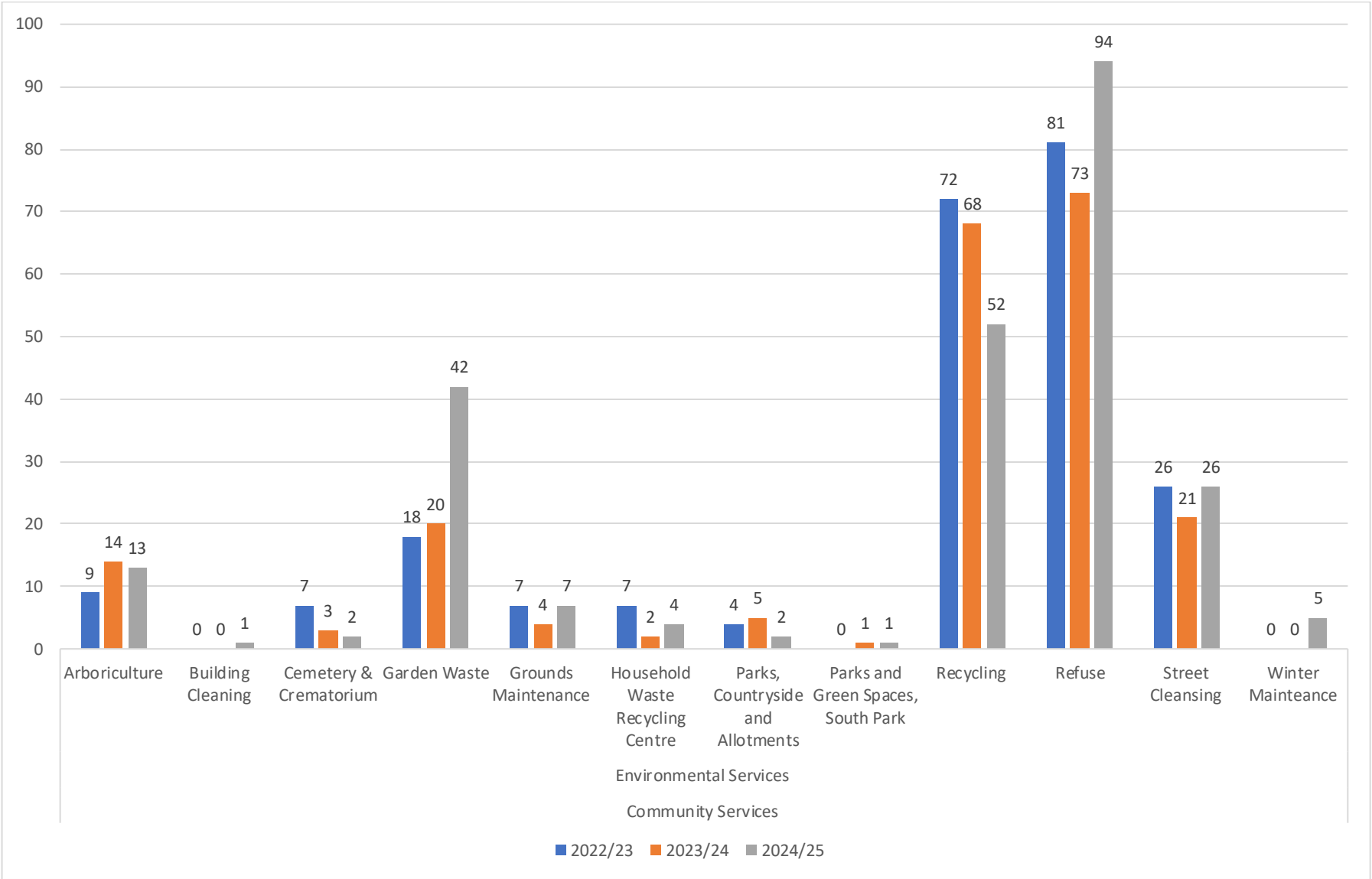
62. Services Group received 348 corporate complaints during 2024/25.

Community Services



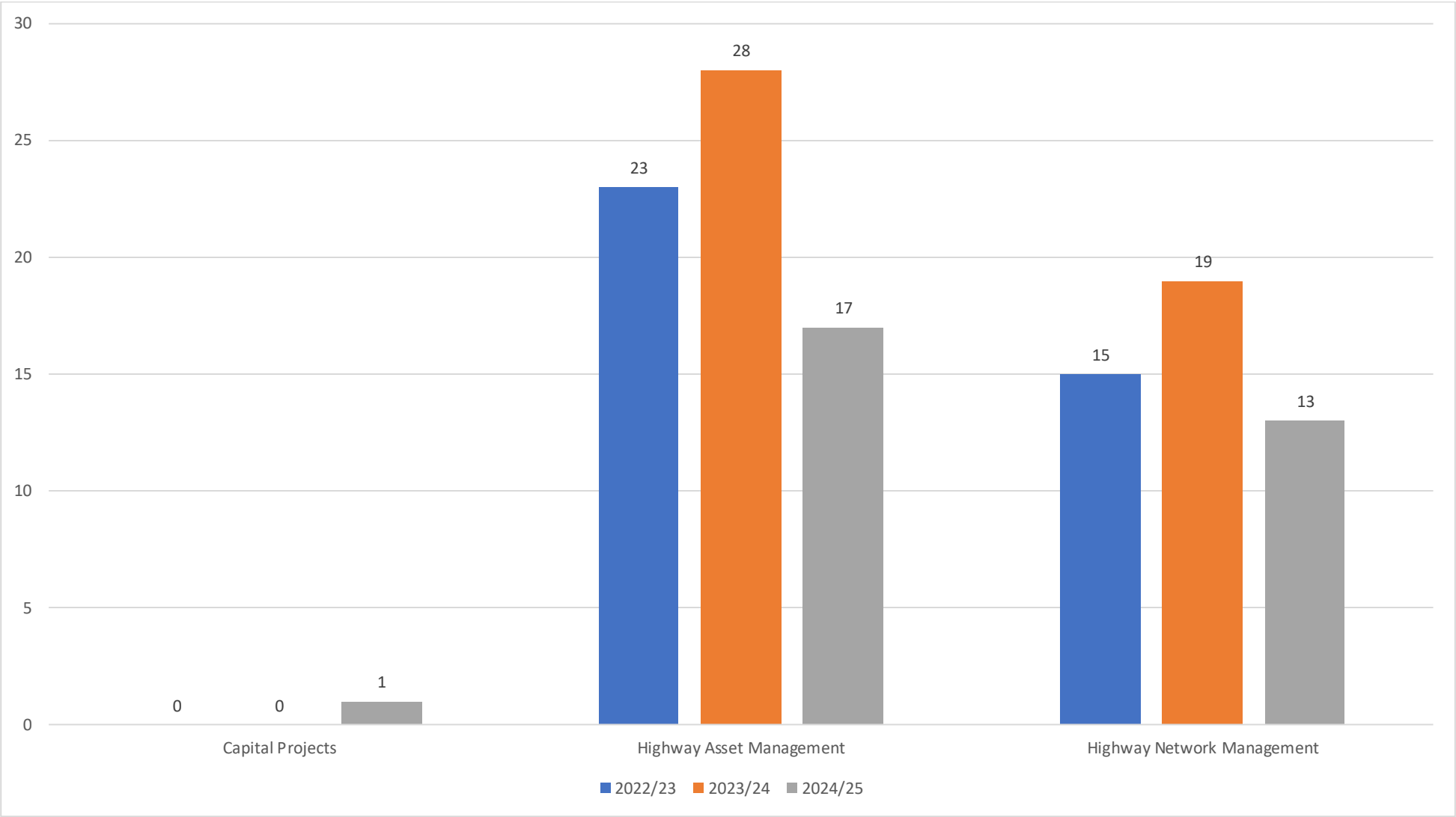
63. Anti-Social Behaviour & Civic Enforcement Ops received 24 complaints during 2024/25, an increase from 15 in 2023/24. The most common themes were dissatisfaction with a perceived lack of action in relation to requests for enforcement and dissatisfaction with the attitude and actions of enforcement officers.
64. CCTV received one complaint in 2024/25, a reduction from nine in 2023/24.
65. Community Resilience received eight complaints during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24. All the complaints received stemmed from a single incident and concerned the Council's interpretation of the Public Sector Equality Duty.
66. Licensing received three complaints during 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
67. Private Sector Housing received eight complaints during 2024/25, an increase from three in 2023/24. All complaints concerned dissatisfaction with the help provided or a lack of response.
68. Crown Street Library received one complaint during 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
69. Events and Banqueting received two complaints during 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.
70. Hippodrome received 16 complaints during 2024/25, a significant reduction from 35 during 2023/24. The main cause of complaints was that staff did not adequately address inappropriate behaviour by other audience members during shows.
71. Dolphin Centre received four complaints during 2024/25, a reduction from seven during 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
72. School and Community Catering received one complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Community Services continued...



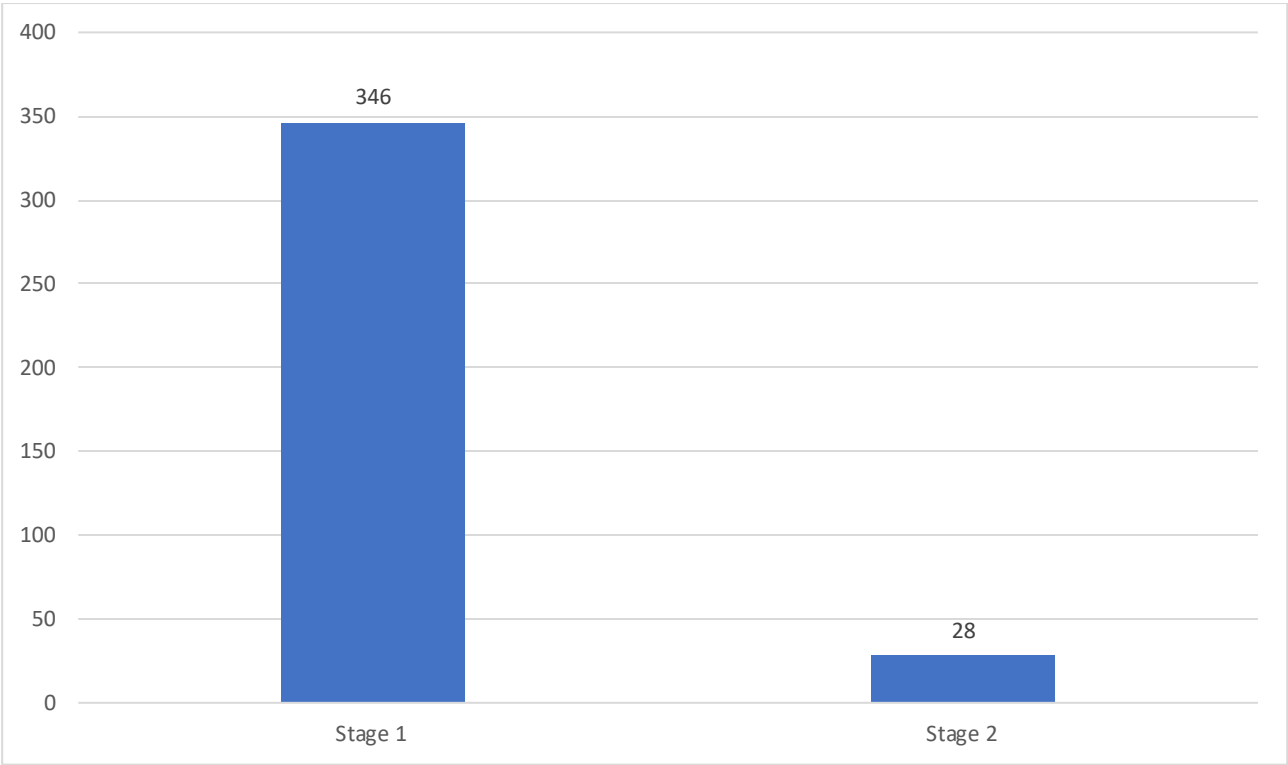
73. Arboriculture received 13 complaints during 2024/25, a decrease from 14 in 2023/24. These complaints generally resulted from dissatisfaction with a decision not to undertake works to a tree for the reasons requested.
74. Building Cleaning received one complaint in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
75. Cemetery & Crematorium received two complaints in 2024/25, a decrease from three in 2023/24.
76. Garden Waste received 42 complaints during 2024/25, a significant increase from 20 in 2023/24. Complaints primarily concerned missed collections, including assisted collections and stickers not being delivered in a timely manner.
77. Grounds Maintenance received seven complaints in 2024/25, an increase from four in 2023/24. Dissatisfaction with the grass cutting service was the main cause of complaint.
78. Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) received four complaints in 2024/25, an increase from two in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
79. Parks, Countryside and Allotments received two complaints in 2024/25, a decrease from five in 2023/24.
80. South Park received one complaint in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
81. Recycling received 52 complaints during 2024/25, a significant reduction from 68 in 2023/24. The most common cause of complaint was recycling not being collected and the caddy not being returned after collection.
82. Refuse received 94 complaints during 2024/25, a significant increase from 73 in 2023/24. Complaints primarily related to refuse collections, including assisted collections being missed on one or more occasion and bins not being returned to the position they were put out for collection.
83. Street Cleansing received 26 complaints during 2024/25, an increase from 21 during 2023/24. Complaints primarily related to the lack of response to requests for service.
84. Winter Maintenance received five complaints during 2023/24, an increase from zero in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.

Capital Projects, Building Services, Highways and Transport



- 85. Capital Projects received one complaint in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 86. Highway Asset Management received 17 complaints during 2024/25, a significant decrease from 28 in 2023/24. Themes included delays in responding to requests for service and dissatisfaction with the impact of highway works on individual properties.
- 87. Highway Network Management received 13 complaints during 2024/25, a decrease from 19 in 2023/24. Themes included delays in responding to requests for service and dissatisfaction with decisions in relation to variety of highways issues.

Complaints by Stage

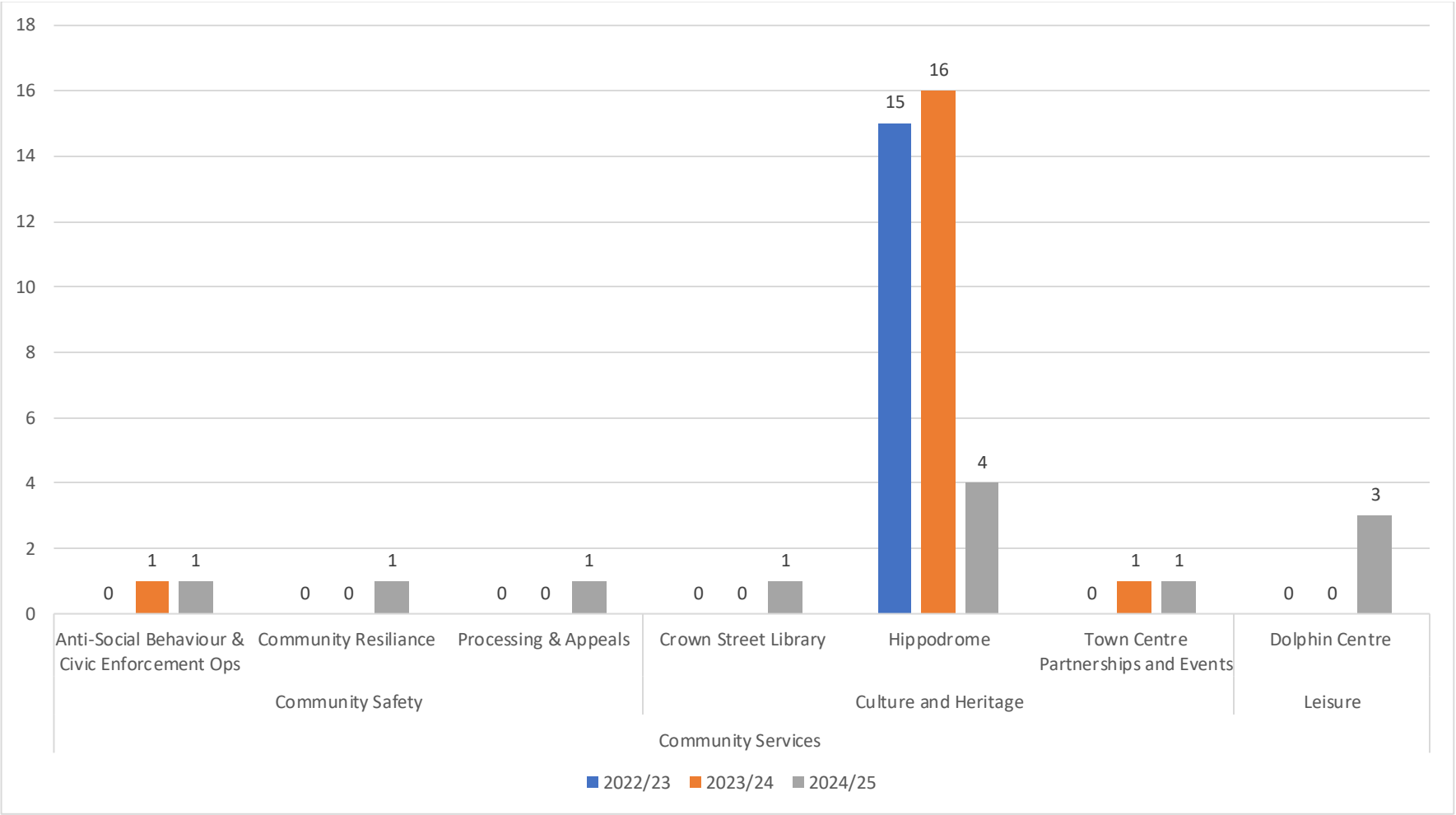


N.B. Two complaints were escalated directly to Stage 2

Compliments by Service Area/Team

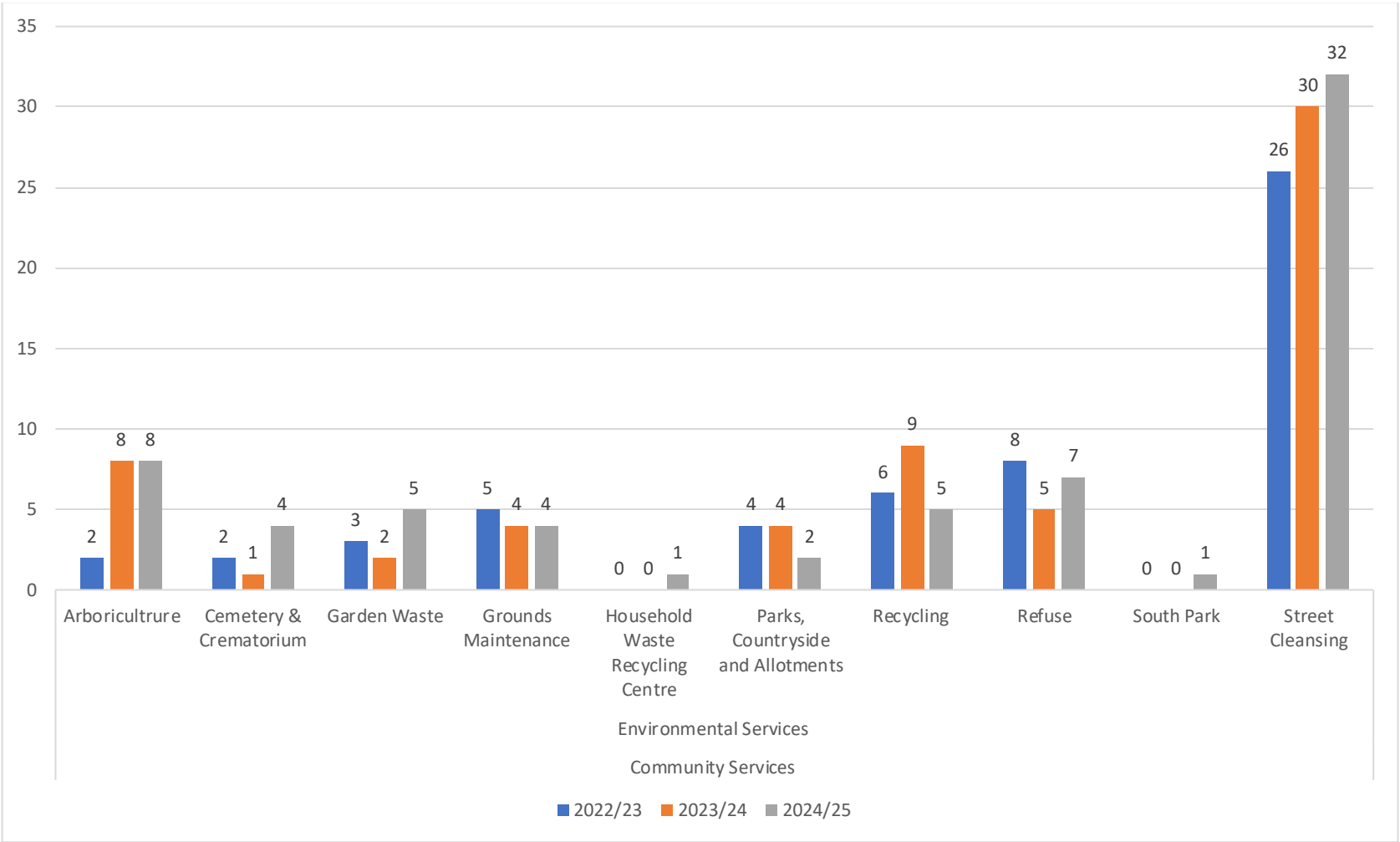
88. Services Group received 87 corporate compliments during 2024/25.

Community Services



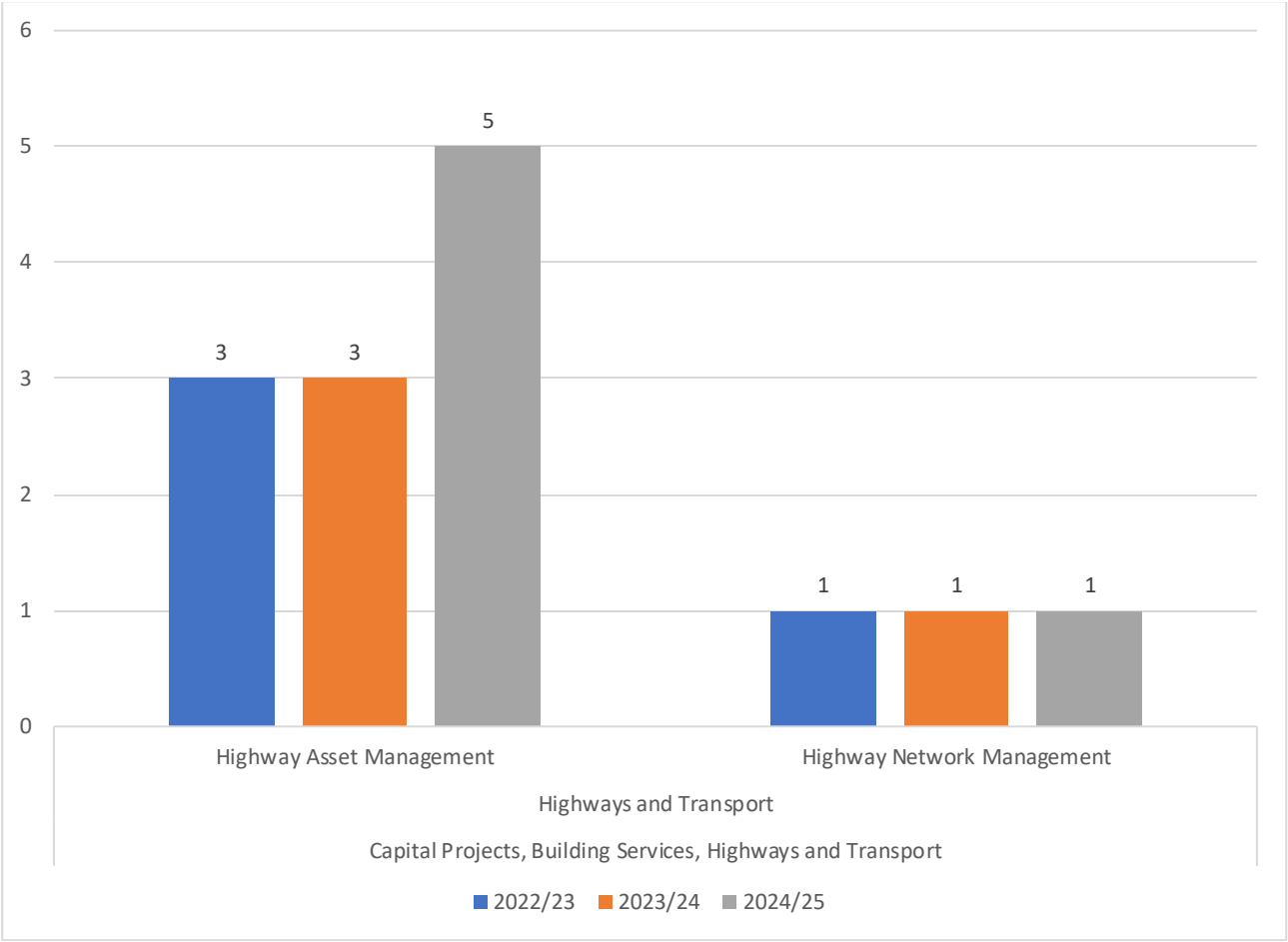
89. Anti-Social Behaviour and Civic Enforcement Ops received one compliment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
90. Community Resilience received one compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
91. Processing & Appeals received one compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
92. Crown Street Library received one compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
93. Hippodrome received four compliments during 2024/25, a significant decrease from 16 in 2023/24. The most common themes were satisfaction with the level of customer service and support from staff.
94. Town Centre Partnership and Events received one compliment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
95. Dolphin Centre received three compliments during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Community Services continued...



96. Arboriculture received eight compliments in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24. The most common theme was satisfaction with tree works.
97. Cemetery & Crematorium received four compliments during 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
98. Garden Waste received five compliments in 2024/25, an increase from two in 2023/24. Compliments concerned people's general satisfaction with the service provided.
99. Grounds Maintenance received four compliments in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24. Compliments concerned people's general satisfaction with the service provided.
100. Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) received one compliment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
101. Parks, Countryside and Allotments received two compliments during 2024/25, a decrease from four in 2023/24.
102. Recycling received five compliments during 2024/25, a decrease from nine during 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
103. Refuse received seven compliments during 2024/25, an increase from five in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
104. South Park received one compliment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
105. Street Cleansing received 32 compliments during 2024/25, an increase from 30 in 2023/24. Themes included general satisfaction with the cleanliness of streets and satisfaction with the team's response to specific requests for service.

Capital Projects, Building Services, Highways and Transport

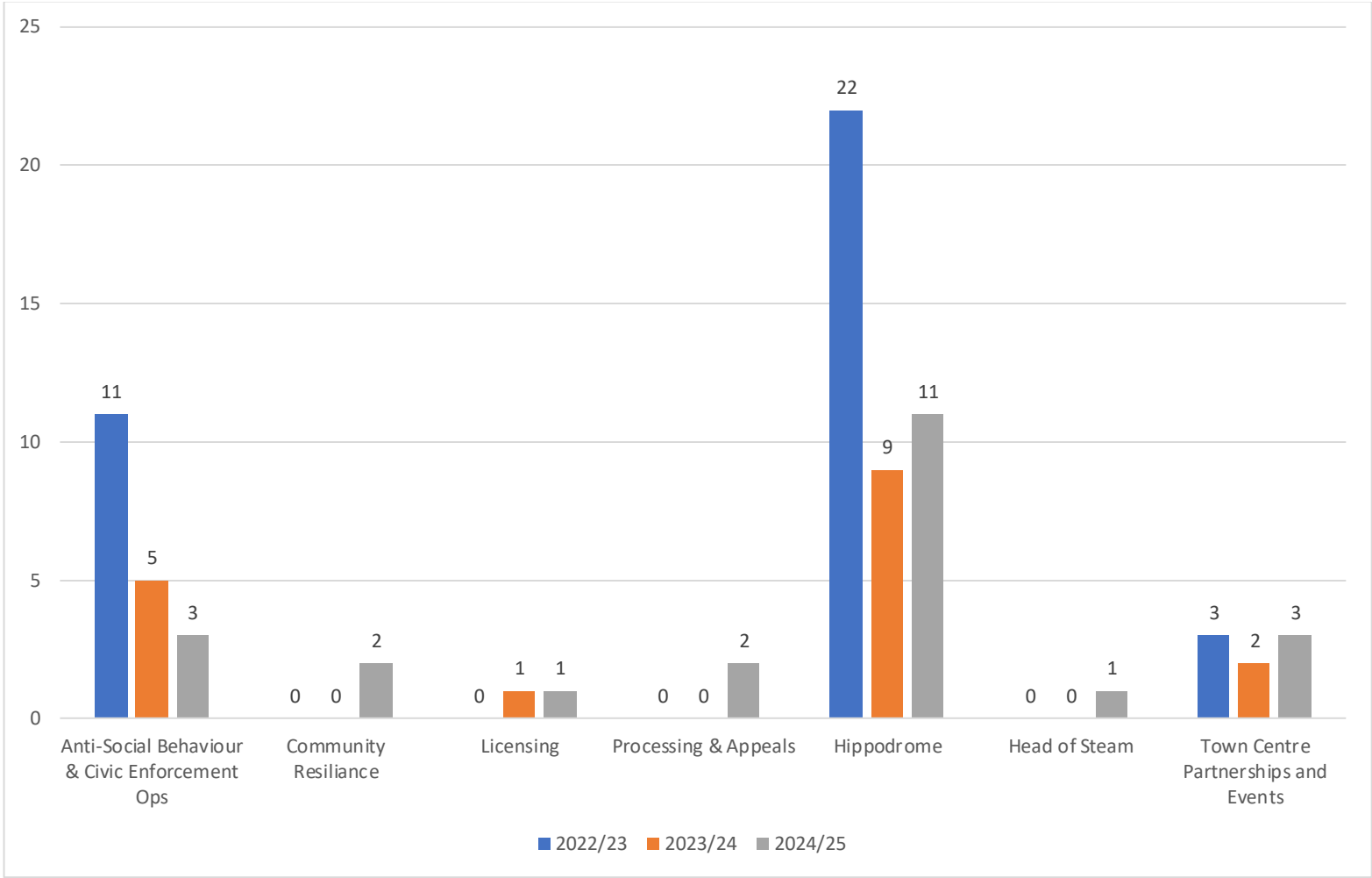


- 106. Highway Asset Management received five compliments in 2024/25, an increase from three in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
- 107. Highway Network Management received one compliment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.

Comments by Service Area/Team

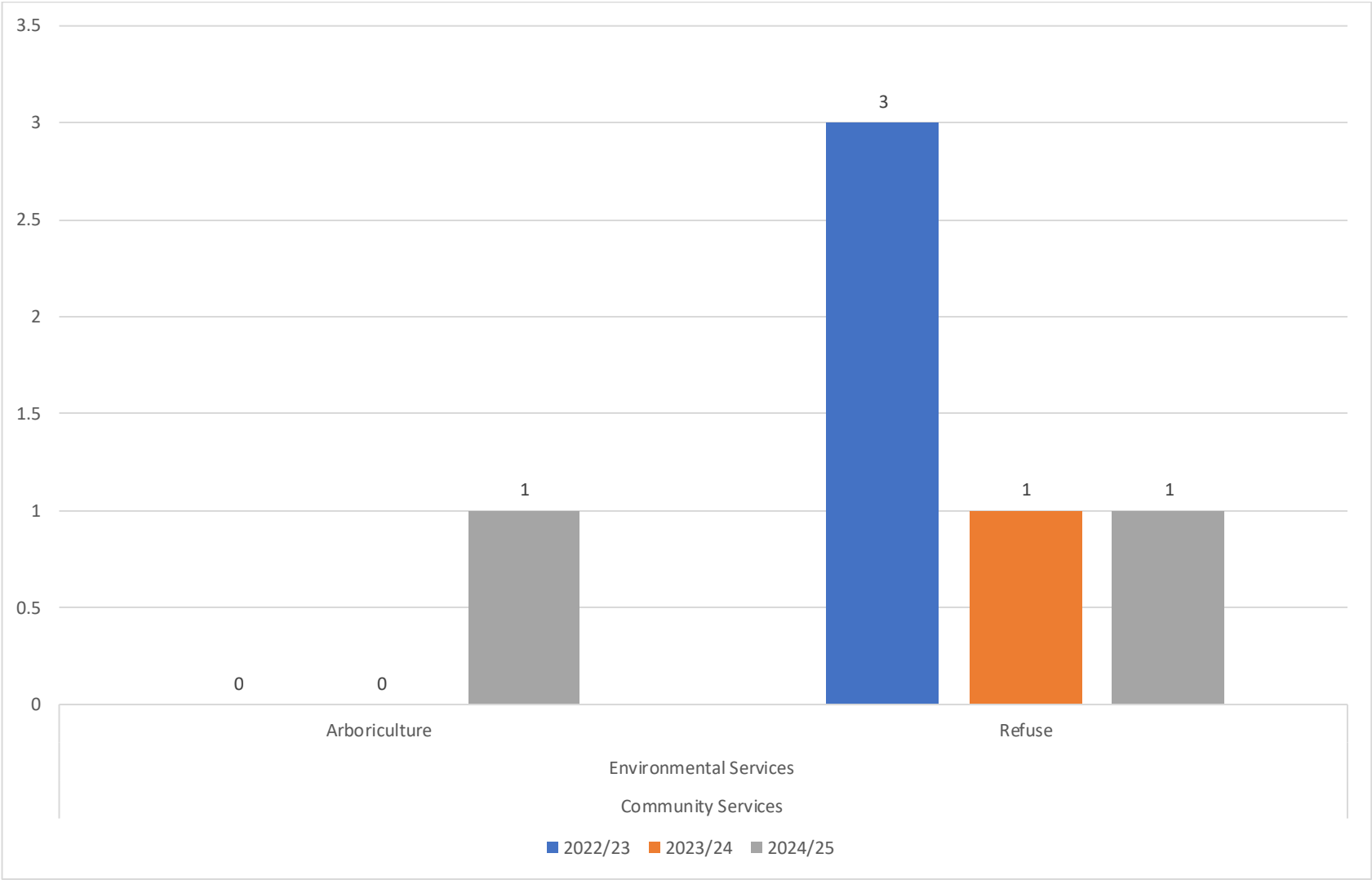
108. Services Group received 38 corporate comments during 2024/25.

Community Services



109. Anti-Social Behaviour & Civic Enforcement Ops received three comments during 2024/25, a reduction from five in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
110. Community Resilience received two comments during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
111. Licensing received one comment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
112. Processing and Appeals received two comments during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
113. Hippodrome received 11 comments during 2024/25, an increase from nine during 2023/24. Dissatisfaction with quality of shows and disruptive members of the audience were the most common themes.
114. Head of Steam received one comment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
115. Town Centre Partnerships and Events received three comments during 2024/25, an increase from two in 2023/24. Two comments concerned the market and condition of town.

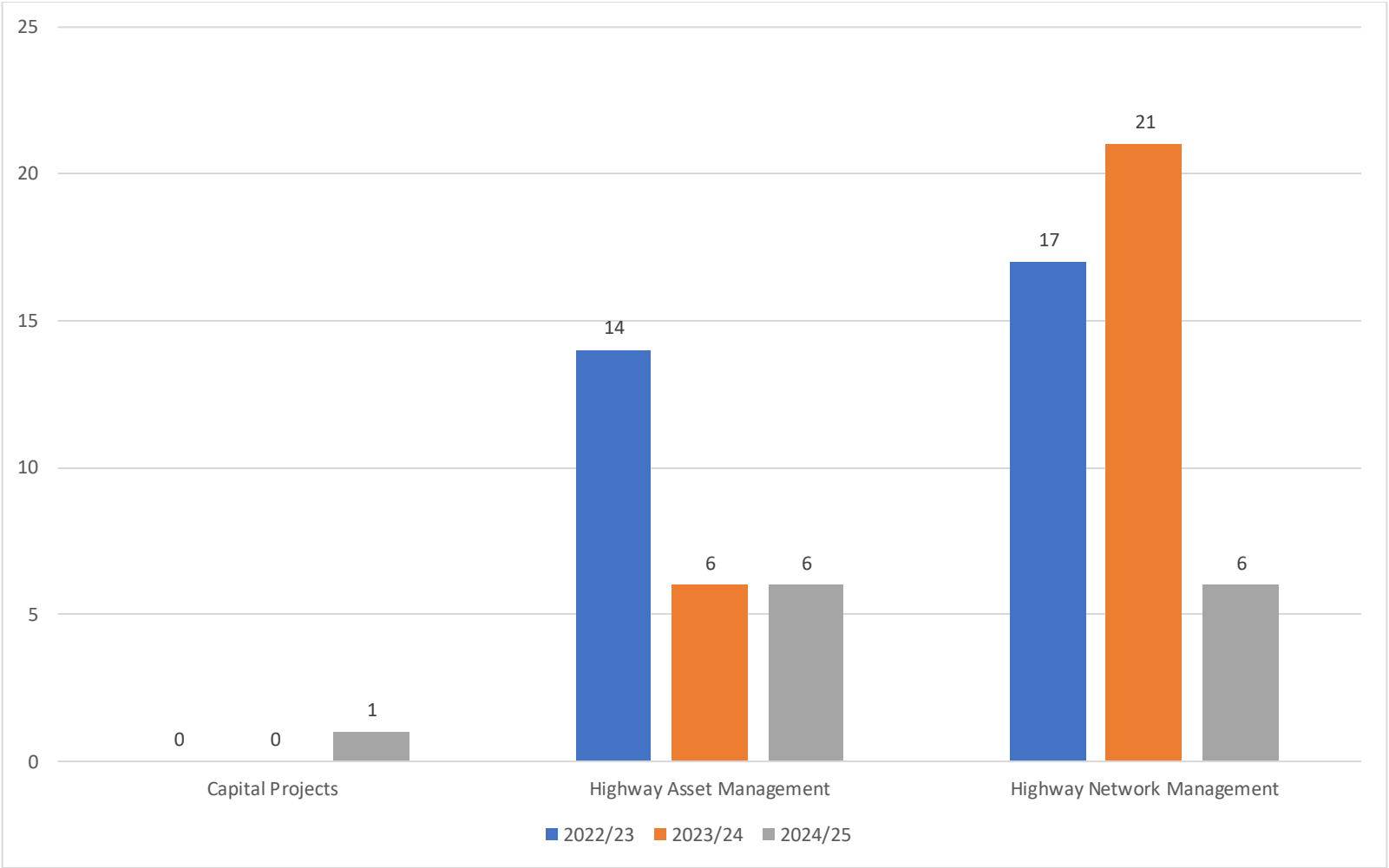
Community Services continued...



116. Arboriculture received one comment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

117. Refuse received one corporate comment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.

Capital Projects, Building Services, Highways and Transport



32. Capital Projects received one comment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
33. Highway Asset Management received six comments in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
34. Highway Network Management received six comments during 2024/25, a significant decrease from 21 in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.

Complaints by Outcome

35. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2024/25.

Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Escalated to Stage 2 (No S1 Response)	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
CCTV	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Anti-Social Behaviour & Civic Enforcement Ops	0	0	3	6	3	5	17
Processing & Appeals	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Licensing	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
Private Sector Housing	0	0	1	2	0	1	4
Hippodrome	0	0	4	3	5	1	13
Crown Street Library	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Arboriculture	2	0	7	0	2	1	12
Building Cleaning and Compliance	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Cemetery & Crematorium	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Parks, Countryside and Allotments	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Grounds Maintenance	0	0	1	1	4	1	7
Street Cleansing	1	0	8	3	5	1	18
Garden Waste	0	1	6	0	29	1	37
Recycling	0	13	11	1	24	0	49
Refuse	0	9	34	3	40	3	89
Winter Maintenance and Call Out	0	0	3	0	2	0	5
HWRC	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
School and Community Catering	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Dolphin Centre	0	0	1	1	4	0	6
Events & Banqueting	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Highway Asset Management	0	0	7	3	5	0	15
Capital Projects	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Highway Network Management	0	1	7	1	2	0	11
Totals	3	25	100	29	130	14	301

Stage 2 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Processing & Appeals	1	0	0	0	0	1
Private Sector Housing	0	1	0	0	0	1
Arboriculture	0	2	0	1	0	3
Building Cleaning and Compliance	0	0	0	1	0	1
Recycling	0	0	0	0	1	1
Refuse	0	0	0	0	2	2
School and Community Catering	0	0	1	0	0	1
Highway Asset Management	0	2	0	0	0	2
Highway Network Management	0	1	1	0	0	2
Totals	1	6	2	2	3	14

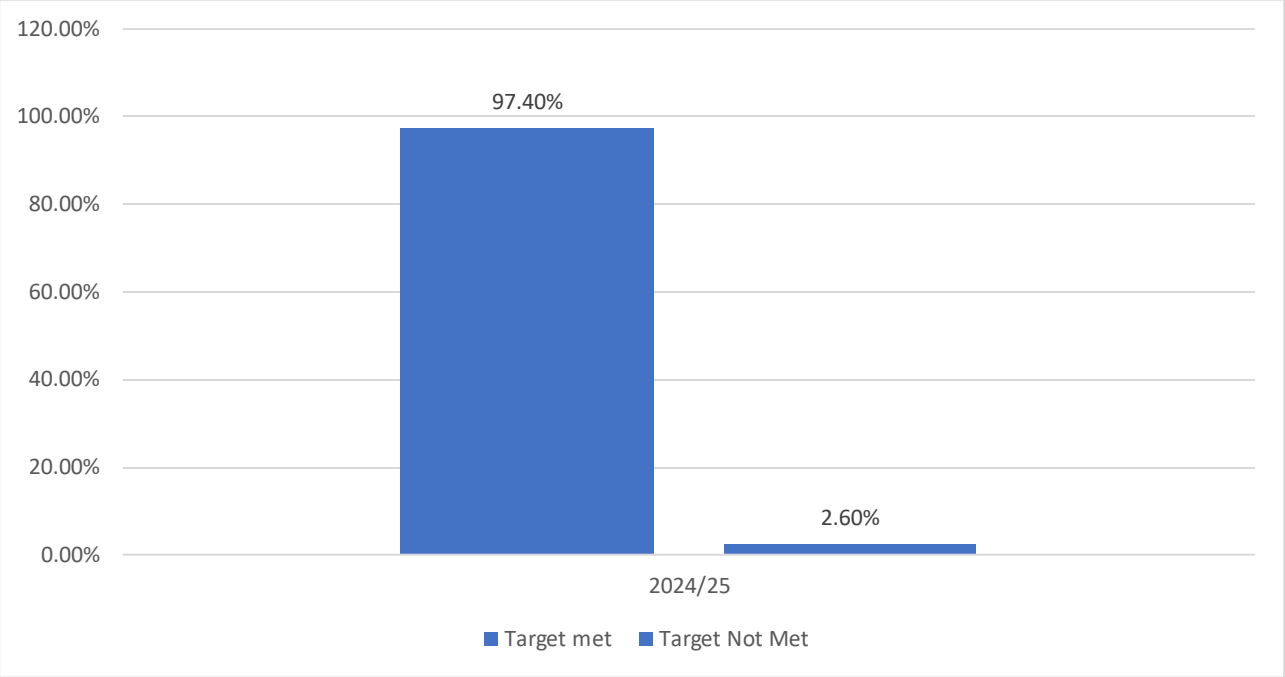
Organisational Learning

36. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, the following organisational learning resulted from the complaint investigations concluded during 2024/25.
37. Following a complaint for Anti Social Behaviour and Civic Enforcement Ops, officers were reminded of the importance of engaging with motorists within a vehicle which is parked in contravention before issuing a penalty charge notice.
38. Following another complaint for Anti Social Behaviour and Civic Enforcement Ops, all officers who triage online reports were advised they must, whenever details are available, make contact with those reporting issues before any further action is taken.
39. Following a complaint for the Dolphin Centre a formalised procedure was implemented to ensure that our pensioner swim price is offered to anyone from outside of Darlington on providing evidence of their eligibility for the concession.
40. Following a complaint for Highways Network Management it was agreed the Council would raise awareness of the Customer Standards with officers.
41. As a result of another complaint for Highways Network Management the Council changed the way we manage requests through the Customer Contact Centre to ensure there is management oversight and that all requests are responded to in a timely manner.
42. Following a complaint for Highways Asset Management it was agreed a letter would be sent to residents prior to any future projects to notify them of the works.

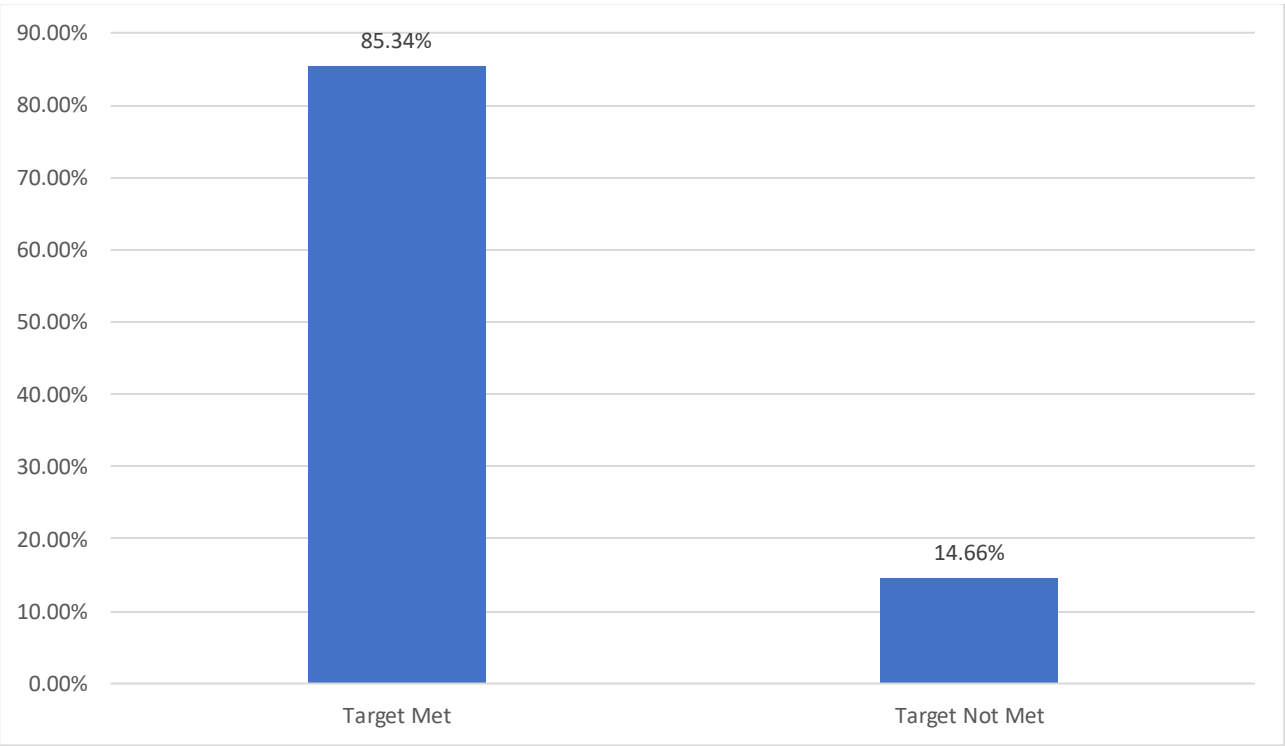
Overall Council Performance against the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

Stage 1

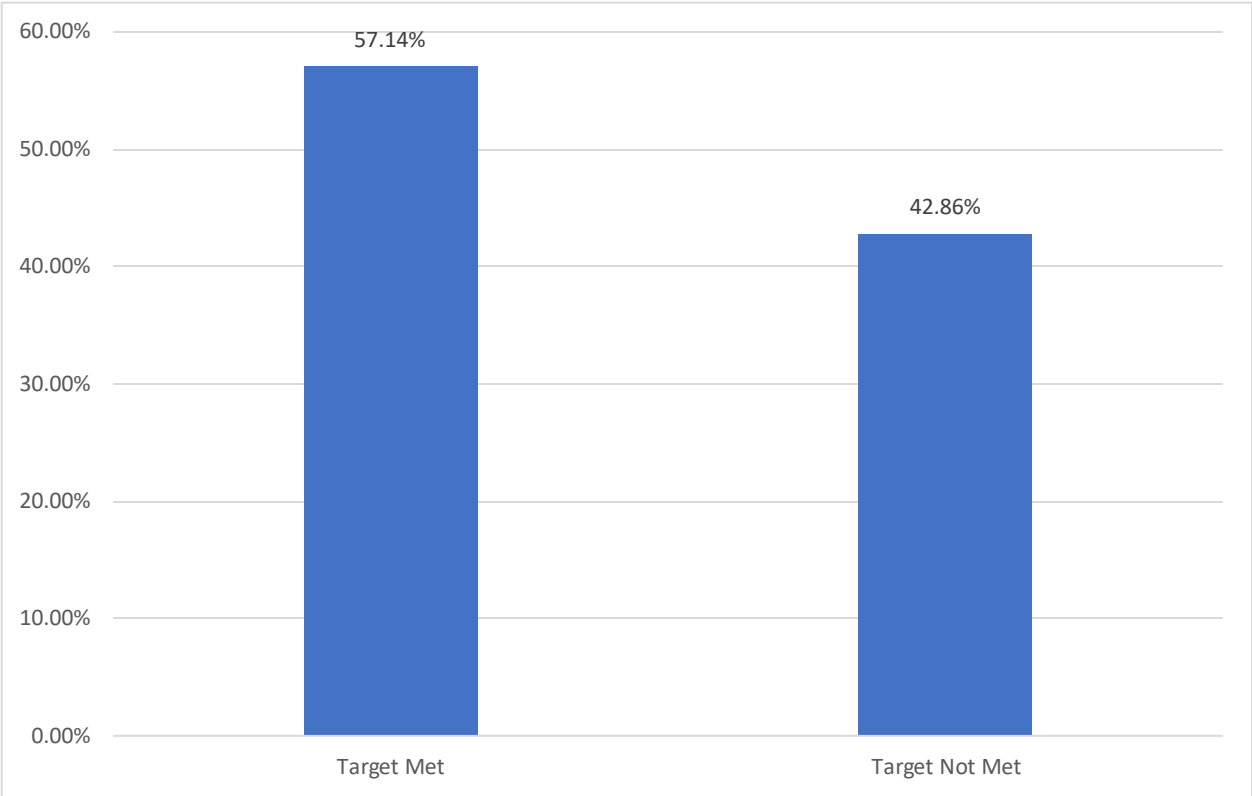
Performance against Stage 1 complaint acknowledgement target (5 working days)



Performance against Stage 1 complaint response target (10 working days)

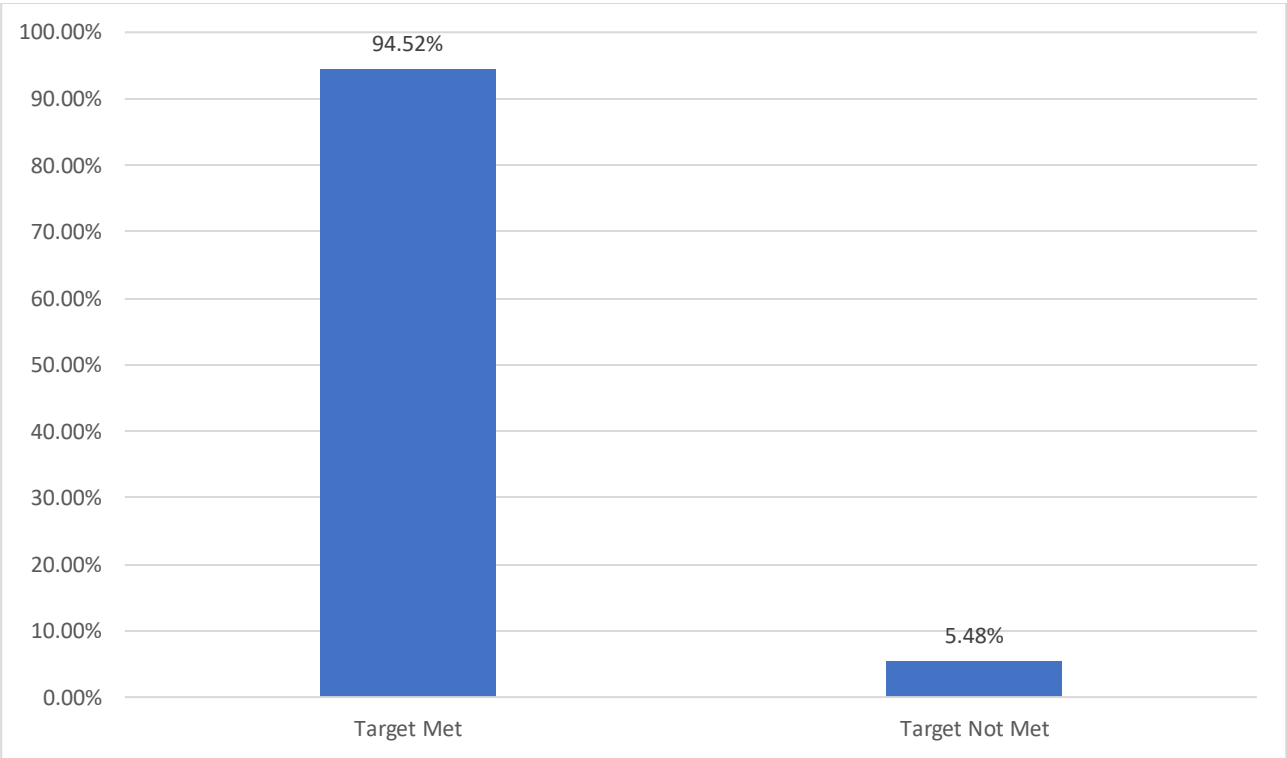


Performance against Stage 1 extended complaint response target (20 working days)

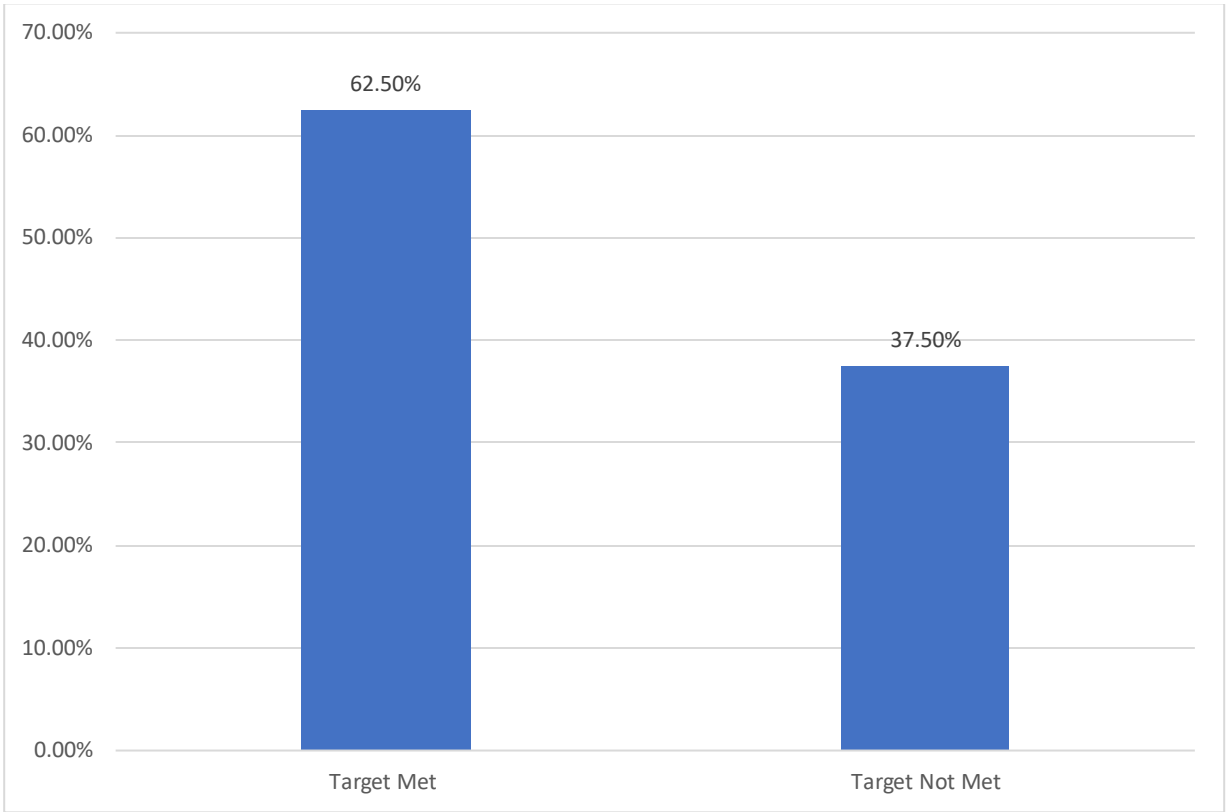


Stage 2

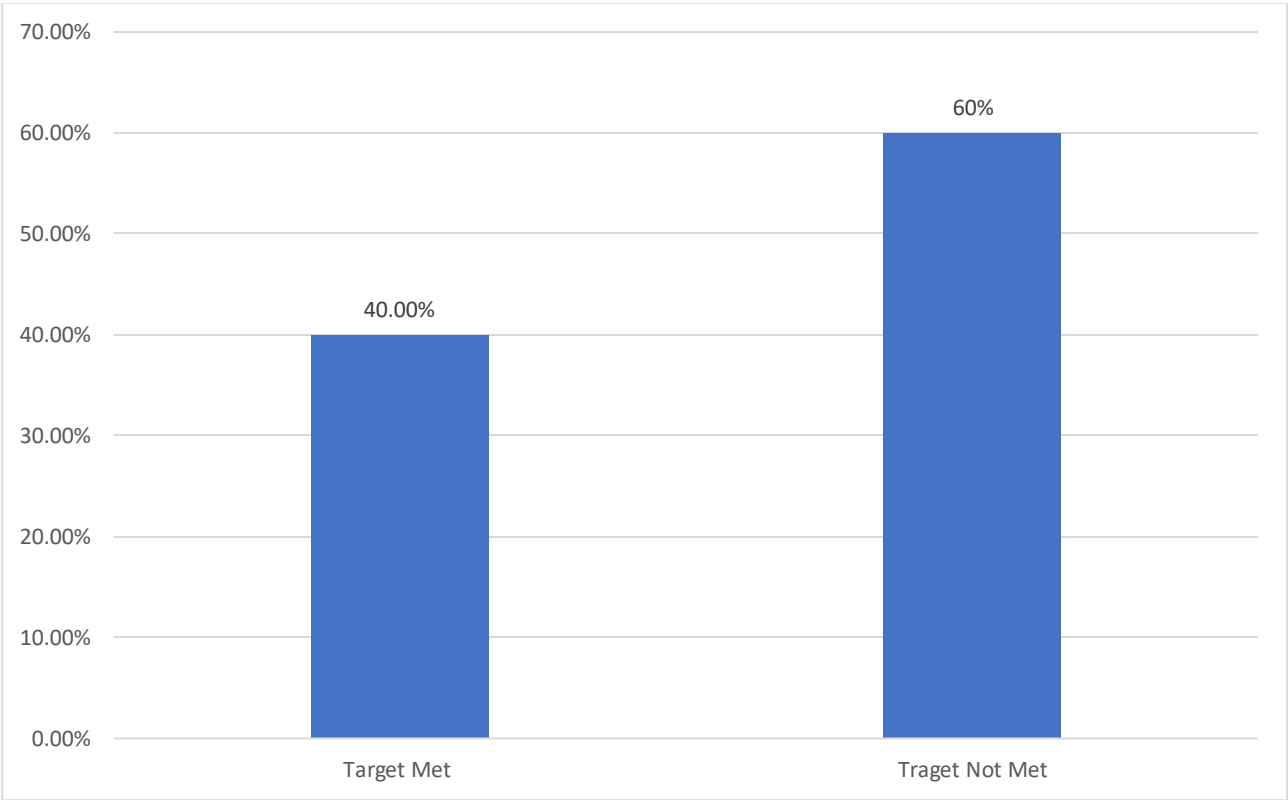
Performance against Stage 2 complaint acknowledgement target (5 working days)



Performance against Stage 2 complaint response target (20 working days)



Performance against Stage 2 extended complaint response target (40 working days)



Further Recommendations

43. The Complaints Manager should provide training for stage 1 responding officers on the updated complaints procedure (introduced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code on 1 April 2024), to improve performance against timescales prior to them being monitored by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman from 1 April 2026.
44. The Complaints & Information Governance Team should work to improve compliance with the new Stage 2 timescales (introduced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code on 1 April 2024), prior to the Council's performance against them being monitored by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman from 1 April 2026.

Performance against Local Performance Indicators

45. In relation to corporate complaints the Council's key performance indicator is the number of upheld decisions received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Council received two upheld decisions during 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24, and an increase from one in 2022/23.
46. Full details of those complaints determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 9 September 2025 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).