

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE OF MEETING:** TUESDAY 18 JULY 2023

**TITLE OF REPORT:** COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS Q1 APRIL-JUNE 2023

**Report of:** Corporate Services

**Cabinet Portfolio:** Leader and Strategic Direction and Partnerships

**Key Decision:** No

**Confidentiality:** Non-Exempt

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. This report updates Members on the number and outcome of customer complaints for Quarter 1, April–June 2023.
2. The report looks at performance on a range of metrics and examines any learning that can be gained from the information presented.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

3. The complaints report for April-June 2023 is noted.

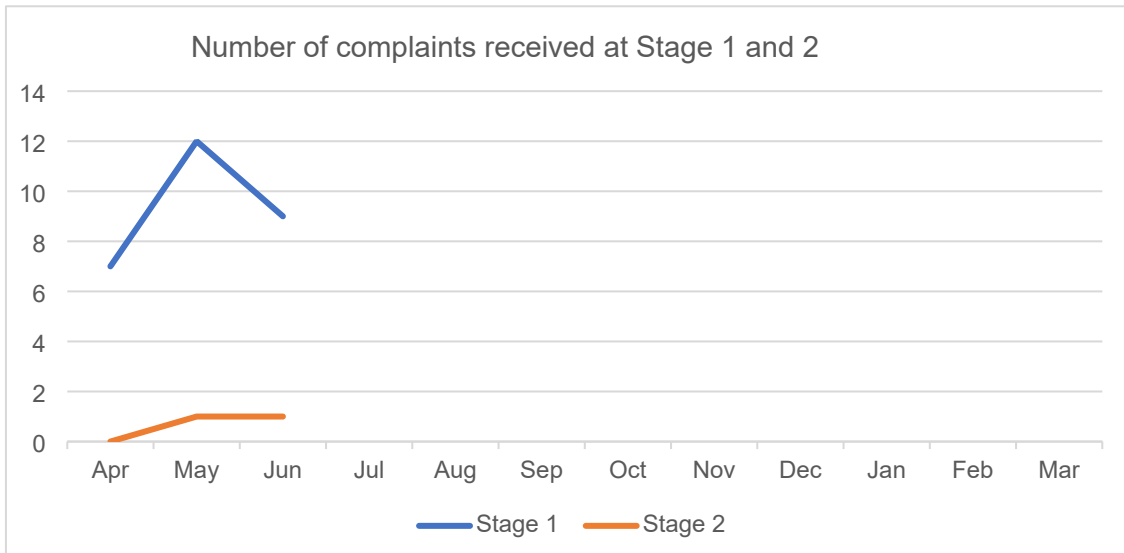
### **BACKGROUND**

4. This report is the first complaint report for this financial year. It provides details of formal complaints received during Quarter 1, April-June 2023. The report reviews data from the corresponding quarter in 2022/23 to provide a comparative data set.
5. Complaints performance is reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the end of each quarter.

### **COMPLAINTS OVERVIEW FOR QUARTER 1, APRIL–JUNE 2023**

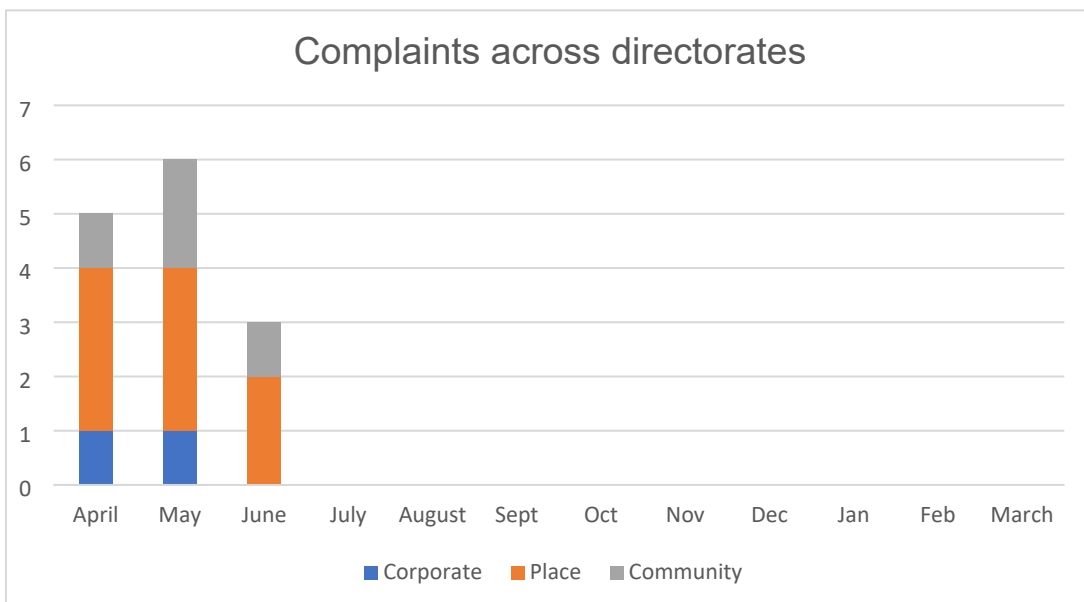
#### **Number of complaints**

6. The Council recorded a total of 30 complaints during Q1. Of those complaints received in Q1, 28 were recorded at stage 1 and two recorded at stage 2.
7. We received 35 complaints in Q1 2022/23 with two reaching stage 2.



### Complaints by directorate/ team

8. Corporate Services account for 60% of all complaints in Q1 2023/24 which includes shared services. Place Services register 27% of all complaints and Community Services 13%.



9. For detailed analysis from across the different service teams, see Appendix 1. This examines the following information:
- Number of complaints reported by team
  - Number of complaints as a percentage against the total
  - How many complaints have been escalated to stage 2
  - Compares against the number of complaints received in Q1 2022/23
10. Shared services (Waste at Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council and Council Tax/ Housing Benefit managed by Capita) account for 89% of the Corporate Services total. The table below shows the split across the different shared services teams.

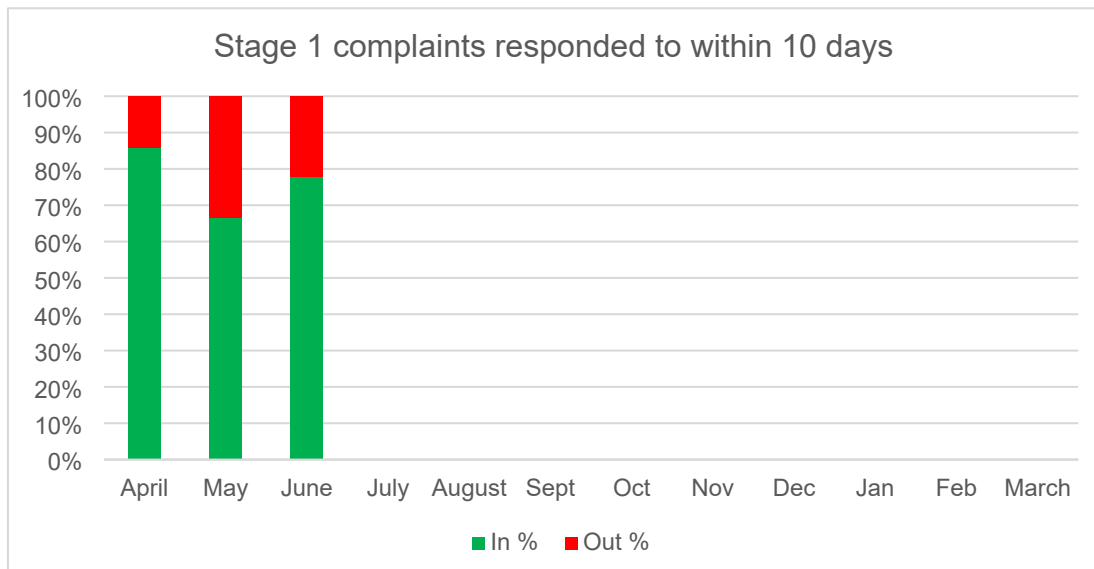
	Waste	Council Tax	Housing Benefit	Business rates
April	1	1	0	0
May	2	5	0	0
June	3	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

11. Each service area, with the exception of Community has seen a reduction in the number of complaints compared to Q1 2022.

	Q1 2023	Q1 2022	Difference
Community	4	4	-
Corporate	2	3	-1
Shared Services	16	18	-2
Place	8	10	-2

### Responding to complaints in time

12. Responding to complaints within published timescales is a key objective for teams across Hart. There is a 10 day service level agreement for stage 1 complaints, and we meet this in 77% of complaints in Q1.
13. As a comparison, we responded to 81% of complaints in Q1 2022/23.
14. There is a 20 day target for stage 2 complaints: we achieved 100% completion from the two complaints investigated in this quarter.
15. Appendix 1 includes the breakdown for each team's response times. This shows that most teams are responding to complaints within target.
16. Two teams do not meet this objective.
- Planning had five complaints in this quarter and responded to 20% of complaints within timescales. The service has been transitioning to a new team following several key staff changes. Its anticipated performance will improve in Q2 as staff become familiar with Hart processes
  - Committee Services managed one complaint in this period. As they responded to the stage 1 complaint outside of the 10 day limit, this shows a 0% completion rate.



### Reasons for complaints

17. We record the reasons why a complaint has been made, in line with the list of categories set out in [the policy](#).

18. The three highest categories of complaint are

- a. Delay in taking action without good reason (nine complaints: 30%)
- b. Not following the law or the council's own policies (five: 17%)
- c. Mistakes in the way a decision has been taken (five: 17%)

19. For stage 2 complaints this year, we have added a new metric to analyse why the complaint has been escalated. In collaboration with officers and the complainant, an assessment of the stage 1 escalation is made based on the following categories:

- Promised action not taken
- Promised action delayed
- Misleading or inaccurate response
- Inadequate explanation
- Failed to address some or all issues
- Disagree with decision

20. In Q1, two complaints have been escalated to stage 2.

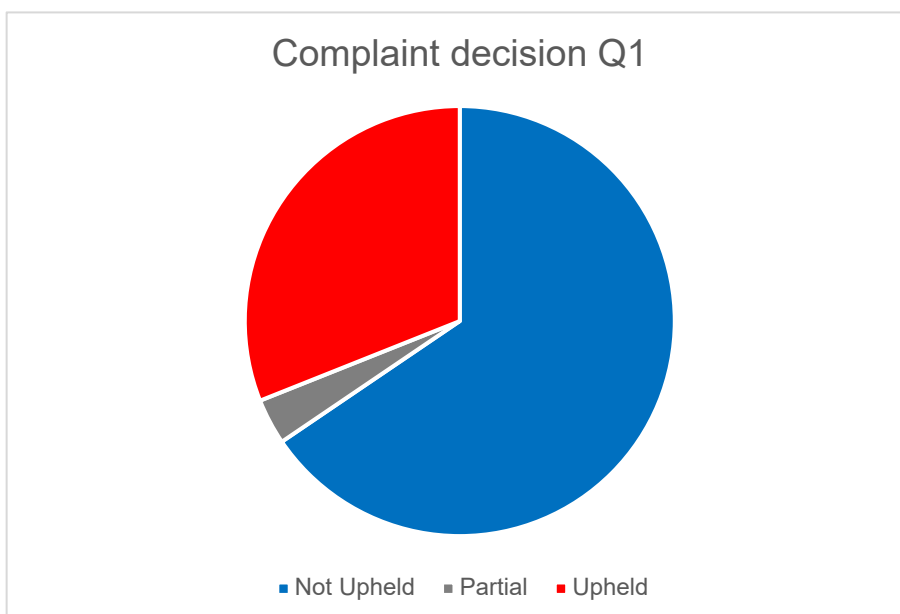
- a. Community (Community Safety.) Complainant disagreed with the decision. The complaint was investigated by Executive Director for Place who did not uphold the complaint
- b. Corporate (Business rates.) Complainant felt that the stage 1 complaint response was misleading. This complaint was investigated by the Chief Executive who did not uphold the complaint.

### Complaint decisions

21. The Council records its decisions on complaints in three ways:

- upheld, where the Council agrees with the complainant
- partly upheld, where the Council agrees with some aspects of the complaint
- not upheld, where the Council does not agree with the complainant

22. We have upheld nine complaints in Q1. Overall, this accounts for 30% of all complaints since April. We have partially upheld one complaint in this time. We have not upheld/ disagreed with 63% of complaints.



### Learning from complaints

23. While learning can be taken from complaints that have not been upheld, the focus is on those complaints that we've accepted some errors or mistakes have been made.
24. Of the nine complaints we've upheld in Q1, there are no clear lessons learned that can be distilled from the responses. The majority are related to staff shortage and/or delays to the initial service request. Anecdotally, officers who have maintained a dialogue with the complainant throughout the course of the complaint appear to satisfy most complainants.
25. Assessing complainant satisfaction with the way Hart have handled formal complaints will commence in Q2. A brief survey will be sent to a sample selection of complainants from Q1 for feedback on the process. The findings will be considered in Q2 report due in October.
26. Training on the complaints process is scheduled to take place with officers in September. This will focus on the mechanics of the complaints process but also look at the culture of complaints handling and how this can be improved.

### Ombudsman decisions

27. No cases were referred to the [Local Government Ombudsman](#) in the reporting period.

## **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

28. As this report is for information and no decisions required, no options have been considered.

## **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or The Hart Vision 2040

29. Performance reporting is an essential element of understanding how the services are performing in the context of the actions being undertaken in Service Plans. Complaints analysis provides officers with invaluable feedback on the provision of services at an operational level.

Service Plan

- Is the proposal identified in the Service Plan? Yes
- Is the proposal being funded from current budgets? Yes
- Have staffing resources already been identified and set aside for this proposal? No

Legal and Constitutional Issues

30. There is no statutory duty to report regularly to Cabinet on the Council's performance. However, under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 (as amended) an authority has a statutory duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. Regular reports on the Council's performance in responding to complaints assist in demonstrating best value and compliance with the statutory duty.

Financial and Resource Implications

31. None identified

Risk Management

32. Complaints about services can indicate where identified operational risks have materialised. This should be monitored through individual departmental risk registers. Learning from complaints can help mitigate the same risks occurring in the future.

## **EQUALITIES**

33. The analysis conducted through this paper potentially have relevance to the Equality Act. One complaint reported in Q1 referenced bias or unfair discrimination. This was a stage 2 complaint not upheld by Place Executive Director who reviewed the stage 1 complaint following allegation of unfair discrimination due to learning difficulties

## **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

34. There are no direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the report

## **ACTION**

35. This report enables Overview and Scrutiny to understand the Council's current performance around complaints handling and performance. Those that are escalated to the Ombudsman could result in a significant detrimental impact on the Council if it is found to be at fault through maladministration or negligence and so it is important that Cabinet and the public can be satisfied that the Council is running a well-managed and effective complaints system.
36. To ensure transparency, the report is available on the Council's website through the committee reports pages.

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**Supporting papers:** Appendix 1 complaints analysis across service areas comparing Q1 2023 with Q1 2022