

Annual Complaints Report 2022-2023

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Executive summary

This report sets out a detailed analysis of the complaints received by Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) between April 2022 to March 2023.

- Running quarter statistics relating to complaints are reported weekly to the Complaints and Customer Satisfaction Team Manager and Service Manager, quarterly to our Service Areas and quarterly to our Stronger Council Scrutiny Committee.
- EFDC received 1,414 formal complaints, of which 743 fit the criteria of a complaint as per our Complaints Policy, giving an average of 117 complaints per month or 29 per week.
- In 2022-2023, 55% of Stage One complaints were upheld, 14% partially upheld, 22% not upheld and 9% fell into the other category.
- The main themes emerging for complaints in 2022-2023 were service not provided, action not taken, limited communication, dissatisfaction with EFDC policies and how matters were handled by EFDC staff and contractors.
- In 2022-2023, 82% of Stage One responses were sent within EFDC's Service Level Agreement (SLA) of 10 working days, while 9% of complainants were sent holding letters, and received responses by the stipulated date in their letters.
- The Council received 21 complaints from the LGSCO, and 11 complaints from the HO.
- It is important that we gather insight from complaints and identify opportunities to improve our service to customers. They are very valuable in gauging how we are currently aligned to our vision.
- We are committed in taking action to improve our complaints performance. Adaptability is necessary to provide the best service to customers.
- This Annual Complaints report will be published on EFDC's website to meet our quality reporting requirements as per the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

1. Accountability for complaints management

- EFDC has a two stage Complaints Process. Stage One complaints should be responded to within 10 working days, and Stage Two complaints should be responded to within 15 working days.
- Where the response timescale cannot be achieved, a holding letter is sent to the complainant, explaining why more time is required to complete the investigation.
- Complainants are sent acknowledgements advising them of the specific date to expect a response if the matter is being investigated, to signpost, or to advise that their concerns are raised with the appropriate teams.
- Complainants receive a comprehensive written response from the investigating senior officer, manager, or director.
- All complaints are fully investigated, and findings are based on available information.
- Complainants are advised that they can escalate their complaint to Stage Two if they are dissatisfied with the Stage One investigation outcome.
- Complainants are advised that they can escalate any concerns to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), or the Housing Ombudsman (HO) during the investigation stage and after the conclusion of Stage Two reviews.
- When complaints are received from the Ombudsman, responses are promptly provided to aid with the initial assessment and investigation.

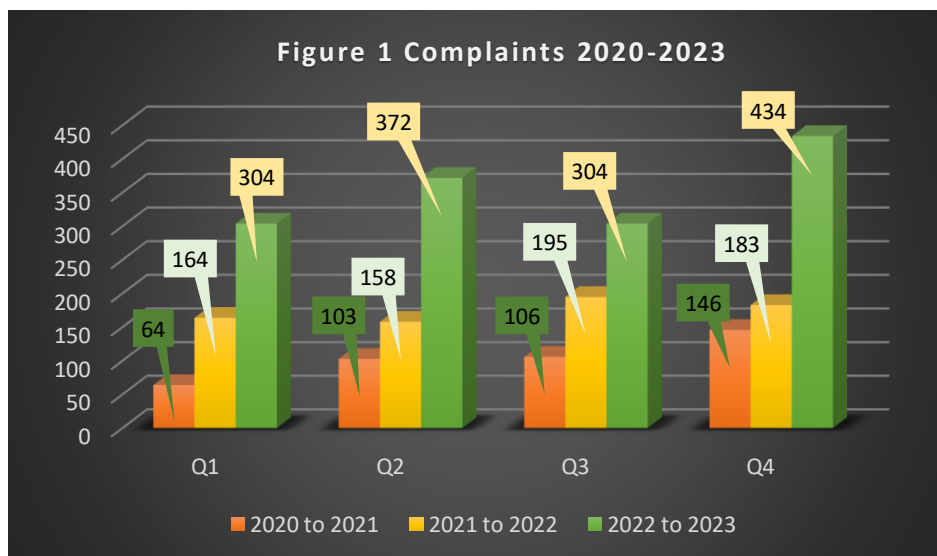
The Complaints Team consisted of the Complaints and Customer Satisfaction Team Manager and Lead Customer Service Officer for 2022-2023. The team is responsible for overseeing our Corporate Complaints Process to ensure that we are adhering to the service level agreement outlined in our Complaints Policy. The team also acts as a liaison to the LGSCO and HO when complaints are escalated to them.

2. Complaints Reporting

Running quarter statistics relating to complaints are reported weekly to the Complaints and Customer Satisfaction Team Manager and Service Manager, quarterly to our Service Areas and quarterly to our Stronger Council Scrutiny Committee. To improve our service level, quarterly complaints review meetings will be held with Service Areas to explore learning, make recommendations and formulate change strategies. We conduct a yearly self-assessment to ensure that we are adhering to the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. We will be posting our Annual Complaints Report on our website for residents to access and review.

3. Total complaints received

Figure 1 shows the total number of complaints received per quarter during 2022-2023 compared to the two previous years.



EFDC received 1,414 formal complaints, of which 743 fit the criteria of a complaint as per our Complaints Policy, giving an average of 117 complaints per month or 29 per week. This compares to 700 formal complaints received by EFDC for the same period the previous year. This is an increase in complaints of approximately 102%.

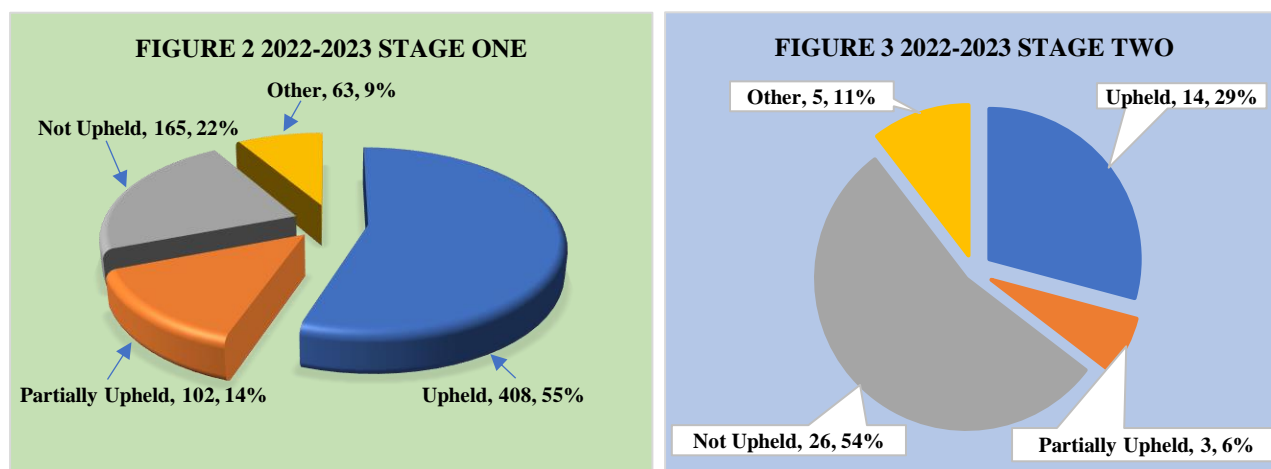
3.1 Complaints investigated per Service Area

EFDC Service Area	Complaints 2021-2022	Complaints 2022-2023
Compliance ICT	9	5
Customer Services	6	7
Community Culture & Wellbeing	0	1
Community Resilience (ASB, noise, fly tips etc.)	19	8
Corporate Services	0	1
Democratic Services (elections etc.)	1	2
Maintenance & Electrical (facilities)	0	0
Grounds Maintenance (verge cutting, etc.)	4	1
Home Ownership	1	1
Homelessness	12	14
Housing Assets & Maintenance	40	51
Housing Allocations	5	5
Housing Development	6	0
Housing Estate and Land	9	13
Qualis Property Solutions (QPS) (repairs)	20	92
Housing Tenancy	25	30
Housing Income Recovery (rent arrears)	3	8
Housing Options	0	0
Planning & Enforcement	28	34
Regulatory & Commercial (environment, licencing etc.)	5	2
Leisure/Car Parking	5	7
Legal Shared Services	5	4
Older People Services (independent living)	0	4
Waste Management	52	406
Revenues & Benefits (council tax, benefits, etc.)	49	40
Technical (trees, drainage, etc.)	3	7
Total	307	743

Qualis Property Solutions (QPS) and the Council's Waste Management Team saw the highest increase in complaints in 2022-2023 with 360% and 681% respectively. These increases were due to QPS taking over boiler repairs from the previous repairs contractor on 1st April 2023 and staff shortages with our waste contractor. Grounds Maintenance and Housing Development saw significant reductions in complaints with 75% and 100% respectively.

4. Outcomes

Figures 2 and 3 shows the categories of complaints outcomes by percentage.



Complaints outcomes are categorised as upheld, partially upheld, not upheld, or other.

Upheld: If evidence presented substantiates the concerns and shows that the Council was at fault, this should be recorded as upheld.

Partially Upheld: If evidence presented substantiates the concerns and shows that the Council was at some fault, this should be recorded as partially upheld.

Not Upheld: If no evidence has been presented to prove that the Council has been at fault, this should be recorded as not upheld.

Other: Where matters that are initially raised as formal complaints but are resolved informally or withdrawn by complainants this should be recorded as other.

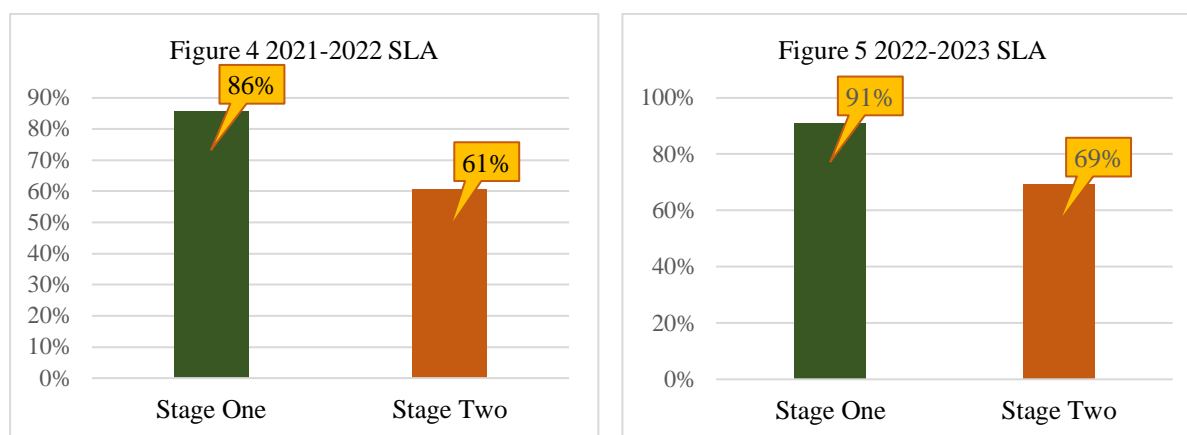
In 2022-2023, 55% of Stage One complaints were upheld, 14% partially upheld, 22% not upheld and 9% fell into the other category. When compared to the previous year, 32% more stage one complaints were upheld, 5% less partially upheld, 28% less not upheld and 1% more fell in the other category. For Stage Two complaints 29% were upheld, 6% partially upheld, 54% not upheld and 11% fell in the other category. When compared to the previous year, 15% more stage two complaints were upheld, 4% less partially upheld, 19% less not upheld and 8% more fell in the other category.

5. Complaint Themes

The main themes emerging for complaints in 2022-2023 were service not provided, action not taken, limited communication, dissatisfaction with EFDC policies and how matters were handled by EFDC staff and contractors. These complaints spanned several departments across the council with most concerns being raised about waste collection matters. When compared to the previous year, all themes except dissatisfaction with EFDC policies emerged. Most concerns raised during this time period were about housing related matters.

6. Complaints Service Level Performance

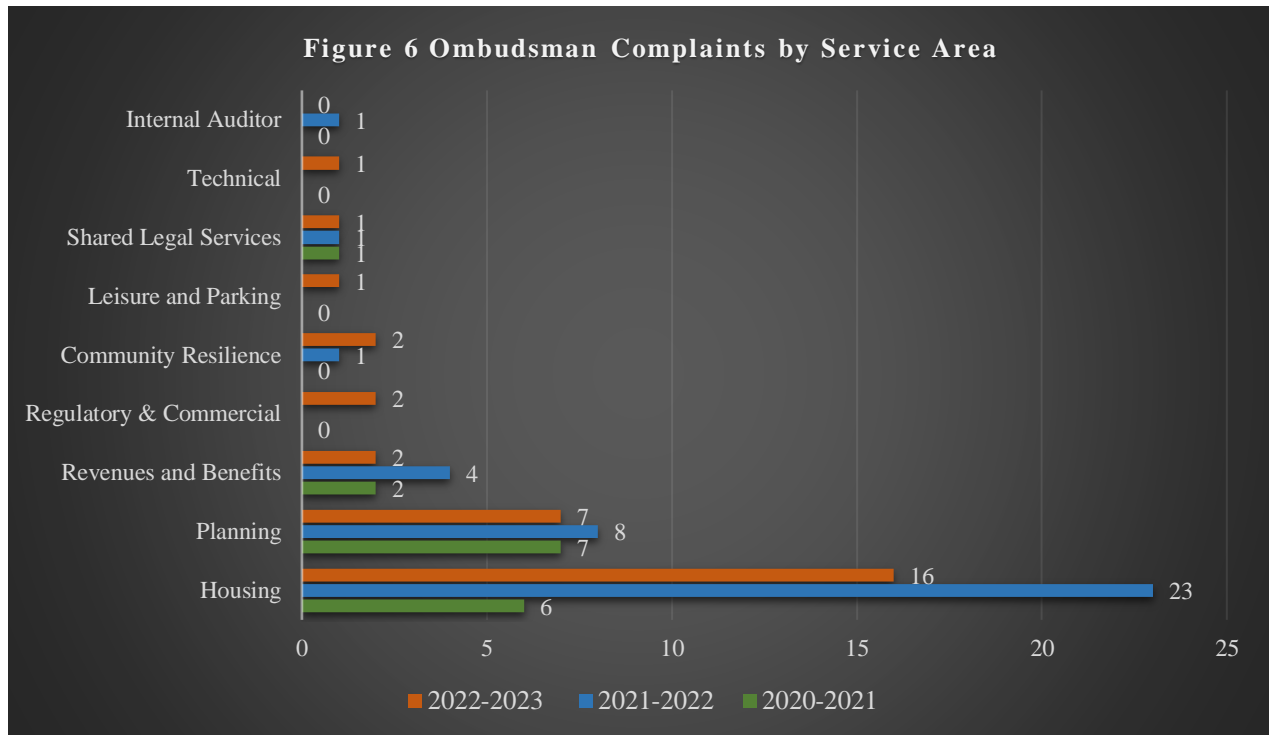
Figures 4 and 5 shows service level performance for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.



All complainants were sent acknowledgements advising them of the specific date to expect a response if the matter was being investigated, to signpost, or to advise that their concerns were raised with the appropriate teams. In 2022-2023 82% of Stage One responses were sent within EFDC's Service Level Agreement (SLA) of 10 working days, while 9% of complainants were sent holding letters, and received responses by the stipulated date in their letters. This means that 91% of responses were sent within the required timeframe, which is an increase of 5% from the previous year. 69% of Stage Two responses were sent within 15 working days, while 61% of responses were sent within SLA for the previous year. Though below our expected target, this was an increase of 8% from the previous year. We did not achieve 100% SLA due to workload and multi-service area complaints which took a longer time to resolve.

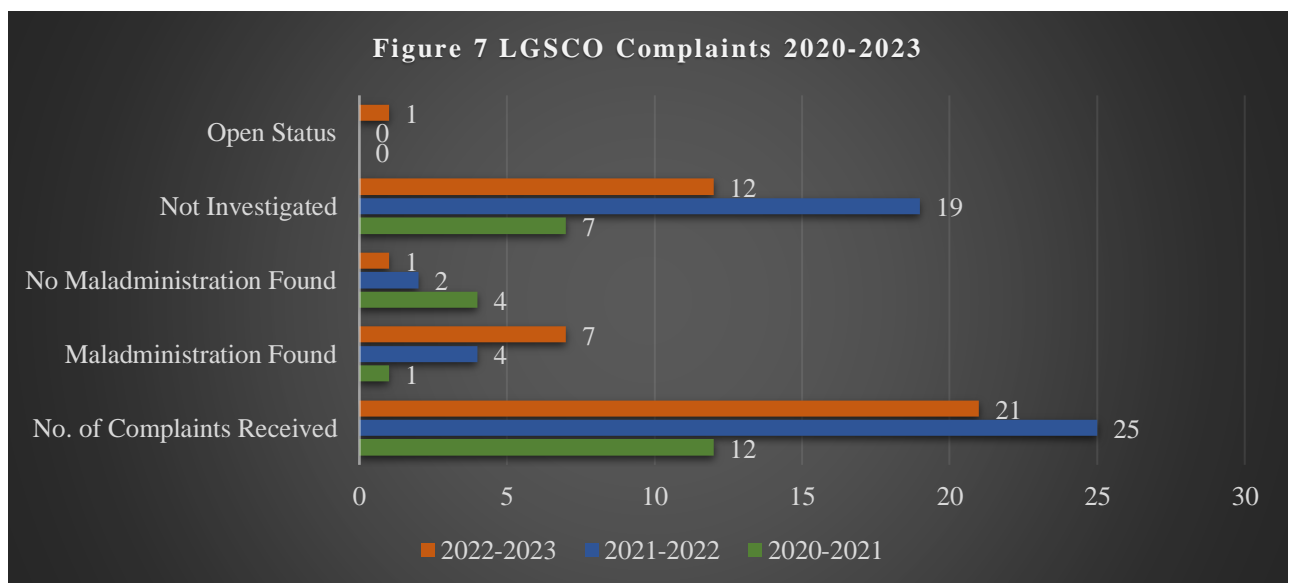
7. Complaints escalated to the LGSCO and HO

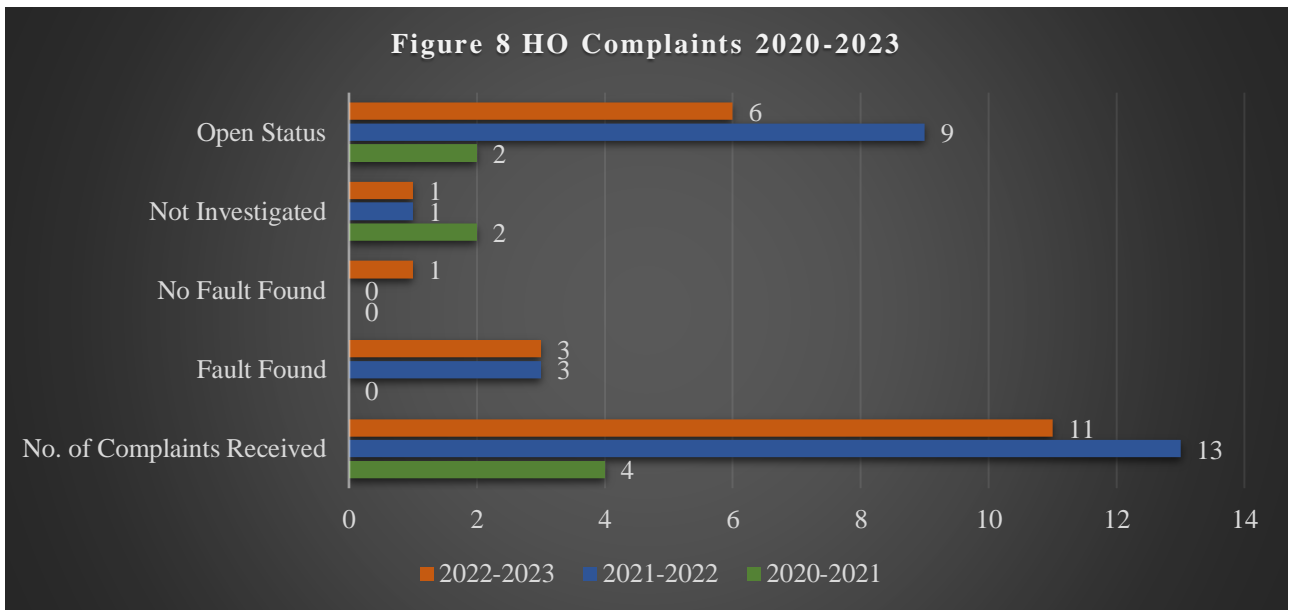
Figure 6 shows Ombudsman complaints escalations per Service Area for 2020-2023.



In 2022-2023, Housing and Planning received the highest number of Ombudsman complaints. Combined they represent 72% of complaints escalated to the Ombudsman. When compared to the previous year there was a 10% decrease in their combined complaints escalation numbers.

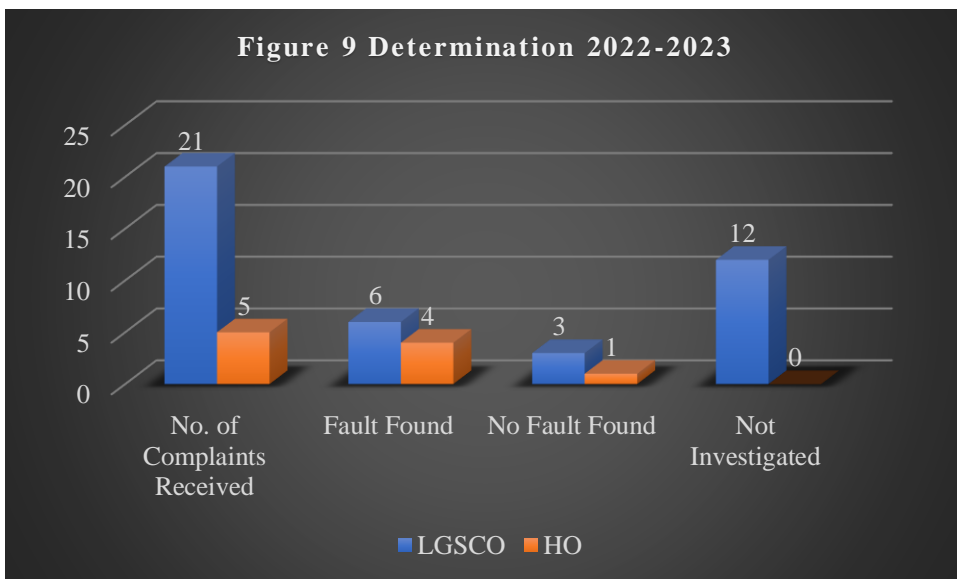
Figures 7 and 8 shows Ombudsman complaints escalations for 2022-2023.





The Council received 21 complaints from the LGSCO, and 11 complaints from the HO. This is a decrease of 16% LGSCO complaints, and 15% HO complaints compared to the previous year.

Figure 9 shows Ombudsman determinations for 2022-2023.



There were 21 determinations received from the LGSCO during 2022-2023 of which the outcomes were: 6 Fault Found/Maladministration, 3 No Fault Found/No Maladministration, and 3 Not Investigated. While 5 determinations were received from the HO of which the outcomes were: 4 Fault Found/ Maladministration and 1 No Fault Found/No Maladministration.

8. Learning from Complaints

It is important that we gather insight from complaints and identify opportunities to improve our service to customers. They are very valuable in gauging how we are currently aligned to our vision. The following are some learnings that we have taken away from complaints.

- There were instances of repeated complaints for the same or similar issues which accounted for some of the spike in complaint numbers.
- Our approved response templates were not used in all instances.
- There was inadequate communication at times during the investigation process.
- There were delays in responding due to staff capacity and availability.
- Though a root cause analysis is conducted weekly a trends analysis would be useful alongside this.
- 9 of the 21 Ombudsman cases determined in 2022-2023 were initially raised with the Council before this time period and one of them was from 2020.

9. The Way Forward

We are committed in taking action to improve our complaints performance. Adaptability is necessary to provide the best service to customers. The below actions will bring about a better customer complaints journey.

- ✓ Workload and capacity management will be a main focus of Service Area Review discussions.
- ✓ Trend Analysis will be done on a frequent basis to identify concerns that may become a major problem.
- ✓ Complaints Workshops will be held to ensure that all Council staff are aware of the complaints process and the Ombudsman Handling Code.
- ✓ Mandatory complaints refresher training will be conducted with all investigating officers, managers and directors bi-annually.
- ✓ Proactive steps will be taken to minimise repeated complaints for similar matters.
- ✓ The Complaints Team will offer an increase level of support to investigators during the complaints process.
- ✓ There will be better collaboration between the Complaints Team and Service Areas to resolve matters swiftly.
- ✓ We will ensure that there is a more consistent approach when responding to complaints which will include the revamping of templated letters.