

NOTICE OF MEETING

Meeting:	RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
Date and Time:	THURSDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2024, AT 10.00 AM
Place:	COUNCIL CHAMBER - APPLETREE COURT, BEAULIEU ROAD, LYNDHURST, SO43 7PA
Enquiries to:	Email: andy.rogers@nfdc.gov.uk Andy Rogers Tel: 023 8028 5070

PUBLIC INFORMATION:

This agenda can be viewed online (<https://democracy.newforest.gov.uk>). It can also be made available on audio tape, in Braille and large print.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting. The seating capacity of our Council Chamber public gallery is limited under fire regulations to 22.

Members of the public can watch this meeting live, or the subsequent recording, on the [Council's website](#). Live-streaming and recording of meetings is not a statutory requirement and whilst every endeavour will be made to broadcast our meetings, this cannot be guaranteed. Recordings remain available to view for a minimum of 12 months.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

Members of the public may speak in accordance with the Council's [public participation scheme](#):

- (a) on items within the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel's terms of reference which are not on the public agenda; and/or
- (b) on individual items on the public agenda, when the Chairman calls that item. Speeches may not exceed three minutes.

Anyone wishing to attend the meeting, or speak in accordance with the Council's public participation scheme, should contact the name and number shown above no later than 12.00 noon on Monday, 18 November 2024.

Kate Ryan
Chief Executive

Appletree Court, Lyndhurst, Hampshire. SO43 7PA
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AGENDA

Apologies

1. MINUTES

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2024 as a correct record.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To note any declarations of interest made by members in connection with an agenda item. The nature of the interest must also be specified.

Members are asked to discuss any possible interests with Democratic Services prior to the meeting.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

To receive any public participation in accordance with the Council's public participation scheme.

4. INFORMATION GOVERNANCE AND COMPLAINTS - HALF YEARLY UPDATE

(Pages 5 - 56)

To receive the half yearly update complaints performance and service improvement report (to include the annual complaints performance and service improvement report 2023/24)

(Members of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel have been invited to attend for this item).

5. FINANCIAL STRATEGY TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT (Pages 57 - 64)

To receive the report of the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group.

6. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT

(Pages 65 - 84)

To receive the report of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Task and Finish Group.

7. TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE (Pages 85 - 108)

To receive an update on the Transformation Programme including Digital Principles.

8. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES

An opportunity for the Portfolio Holders to provide an update to the Panel on developments within their portfolios.

9. WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 109 - 110)

To agree the work programme to guide the Panel's activities over the coming months.

10. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

To:

Councillors

Alan O'Sullivan (Chairman)
Barry Dunning (Vice-Chairman)
Alan Alvey
Jack Davies
Jacqui England

Councillors

Barry Rickman
Alex Wade
Christine Ward
Phil Woods

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Resources & Transformation Overview & Scrutiny Panel – 21 November 2024

(with members of the Housing & Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel invited)

Half Yearly Update Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

Purpose	For Review
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The Council must comply with increased self-assessment, reporting and compliance and scrutiny requirements in relation to its complaints handling and performance as set out in the Housing Ombudsman’s statutory Complaint Handling Code and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s non-statutory Complaint Handling Code.</p> <p>To meet these requirements, the Council now produces an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for each financial year, which must be approved by Cabinet, as the Council’s governing body, and submitted to the Housing Ombudsman by 30 June each year.</p> <p>The Council has also chosen to prepare a half yearly update to provide the Panel and Cabinet with an overview of complaint handling following the end of the first half of each financial year.</p> <p>This report includes the half yearly update for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 which will go on to be scrutinised by Cabinet.</p>
Recommendations	That the Panel note the half yearly update.
Reasons for recommendation	The half yearly update on complaints has been introduced to meet increased scrutiny requirements, as set out in the complaint

	handling codes, ensuring both overview and scrutiny panels and Cabinet, as the governing body, receive regular updates on complaint handling.
Wards	All
Portfolio Holders	Councillor Jeremy Heron – Finance and Corporate Councillor Steve Davies - Housing and Homelessness
Strategic Directors	Alan Bethune – Strategic Director Corporate Resources & Transformation
Officer Contact	Amanda Wilson Information Governance and Complaints Manager 02380 285306 amanda.wilson@nfdc.gov.uk

Introduction and background

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members with a half yearly update complaints performance and service improvement report to cover the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 (**Appendix 1**).
2. This report also outlines some of the key changes to member scrutiny of complaints following two new Complaint Handling Codes from both the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman taking effect.

Previous process for member scrutiny of complaints

3. Officers previously provided the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel with the Council’s annual complaints report at its November meeting for the preceding financial year. This annual report included an overview of complaints received, and dealt with, by the Council’s Information Governance and Complaints Team during the relevant financial year. It also covered complaints where either the Local Government and Social Care or the Housing Ombudsman had been involved and some comparisons with previous years were included. This report also included some examples of the compliments and positive feedback that had been received by officers during the relevant time.

4. This report also provided members with the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code which was in place previously.

New Complaint Handling Codes

5. There are two Ombudsmen with jurisdiction over the Council. The Housing Ombudsman for complaints from the Council's tenants relating to the Council in its capacity as their landlord and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman with jurisdiction over all other complaints.
6. In July 2020 the Housing Ombudsman published a Complaints Handling Code. This code was introduced to provide a high-level framework to support landlords in handling housing related complaints. The Housing Ombudsman conducted a review of the code one year after it took effect to strengthen and support a positive complaint handling culture. The changes took effect from 1 April 2022. The Council's previous self-assessments were against this Code.
7. In September 2023 both the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman launched a consultation on a Joint Complaint Handling Code ('the Joint Code'). The aim of the Joint Code was to put *'complaint handling at the heart of corporate governance in councils, requiring regular reporting of performance allowing for effective scrutiny of service delivery'*.
8. Following the outcome of the consultation it was concluded that it was not possible for the Joint Code to take effect due to the difference in the respective powers of each of the Ombudsman. In particular, the statutory power in accordance with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 for the Housing Ombudsman to issue a statutory code of practice and the statutory duty for the Housing Ombudsman to monitor compliance with the code. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman accordingly issued a separate non-statutory code which is aligned to the Housing Ombudsman's statutory code.
9. From 1 April 2024, both the statutory [Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code](#) and the non-statutory [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code](#) took effect.
10. The Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure was largely compliant with the Codes, However, some amendments to the procedure were required which took effect on 1 April 2024.

11. The new Complaint Handling Codes include a requirement to produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge which must include:
- (a) the annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure the Council's complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements;
 - (b) a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Council's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the Council has refused to accept;
 - (c) any findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Ombudsman;
 - (d) the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;
 - (e) any annual report about the Council's performance from the Ombudsman;
 - (f) any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the Council.
12. The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code states that *'The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.'* Guidance produced by the Housing Ombudsman provides that for a local authority, the governing body is Cabinet.
13. In addition, the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code includes the following requirements:
- '1.70 '...a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').*
- 1.71 The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.*
- 1.72 As a minimum, the MRC, and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive:*
- (a) *regular updates on the volume, categories, and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance*

- (b) *regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling*
 - (c) *regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings*
 - (d) *the annual complaints performance and service improvement report'*
14. The guidance produced by the Housing Ombudsman provides that for a local authority, the MRC will be the portfolio holder with responsibility for Housing.
15. In addition, the Housing Ombudsman's guidance published on its website states that the self-assessment form, the annual complaints performance and service improvement report and the governing body's response should be submitted to the Housing Ombudsman by 30 June each year for the preceding financial year (in line with the submissions date for the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM)).
16. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, includes mostly equivalent provisions to those set out above. However, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is less prescriptive on who should hold the role of MRC. There is also no requirement for the self-assessment against the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's code nor the annual complaint performance and service improvement report to be submitted to them.

The Council's New Arrangements

17. To meet the new member scrutiny requirements, the following arrangements have been put in place:
- There are two MRCs:
 - Housing and Homelessness Portfolio Holder – MRC - complaints under the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman (and other Housing complaints).
 - Finance and Corporate Portfolio Holder – MRC - all other corporate complaints.
 - The MRCs will be given regular updates on complaint handling through their Portfolio Holder Briefings.

- Cabinet, as the governing body, will also receive two reports per year on complaint handling to meet the obligations under the codes:
 - June - The annual complaints performance and service improvement report will be considered and the governing body's formal response will be approved, prior to being published and then submitted to the Housing Ombudsman by 30 June each year.
 - December – The half yearly update report.
- Overview and Scrutiny Panels:

It remains important that there is still general scrutiny of the Council's complaints handling process. The panels will receive two updates per year:

- November - Resources and Transformation Panel (Housing and Communities Panel members invited) – The half yearly update report.
- The arrangements for the scrutiny of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report prior to June Cabinet (and the 30 June submission date) are being reviewed due to the timings of scheduled meetings.

Annual Complaints Performance And Service Improvement Report For 2023/2024

18. The annual complaints performance and service improvement report 2023/24 took a different form to the Council's previous complaints reports to meet the enhanced requirements of the complaint handling codes. The report included reflective analysis on the 2023/24 financial year, as well as proposing actions with the aim of improving the Council's complaint handling going forward. The report also included compliments and positive feedback.
19. As a result of the timings of the newly issued codes taking effect on 1 April 2024, the 30 June 2024 submission date, and the Council's scheduled meeting timetables, it was not possible for full Cabinet to receive the annual complaints performance and service improvement report for 2023/24 before its submission.
20. The Housing Ombudsman confirmed that it was acceptable for this report to be approved by, and the response provided on behalf of

Cabinet(as the governing body) by, the MRCs through a portfolio holder decision.

21. The [joint portfolio holder decision](#) was made on 13 June 2024. The submission to the Housing Ombudsman took place before the 30 June 2024 deadline and the documents are published on the Council's webpage: [Feedback, comments and complaints - New Forest District Council](#).

Half yearly update report

22. The half yearly update report is included at **Appendix 1**.
23. This report also includes a link to the published annual complaints performance and service improvement report 2023/24.

Corporate plan priorities

24. Our approach to complaint handling is in line with the Council's [Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 for people, place and prosperity](#) and our values: LEAF:
 - Learning: we use complaints as an opportunity to learn from our mistakes.
 - Empathy: we show empathy to complainants.
 - Ambition: we have ambition to improve our services where it is identified that someone has not received the standard of service that they should have.
 - Fairness: we are fair to complainants and residents in our complaint handling.

Options appraisal

25. An alternative option would be for the Panel to continue to only receive one update each year on complaints. However, it is considered that bringing two updates is more in keeping with the requirements of the complaint handling codes.

Consultation undertaken

26. EMT has been consulted on this report.
27. The MRCs have also received an update on the information included within the report through their portfolio holder briefings.

Financial and resource implications

28. There are none arising directly from this report.

Legal implications

- 29. The Council is subject to a legal requirement to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's statutory Complaint Handling Code.
- 30. The Council should also be complying with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's non-statutory Complaint Handling Code.

Risk assessment

- 31. A formal risk assessment is not deemed to be required.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

- 32. There are none arising directly from this report.

Equalities implications

- 33. There are none arising directly from this report.

Crime and disorder implications

- 34. There are none arising directly from this report.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

- 35. There are none arising directly from this report.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Half yearly update complaints performance and service improvement report

Background Papers:

Published documents as referred to within report



Half Yearly Update Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024

Information Governance and Complaints Team

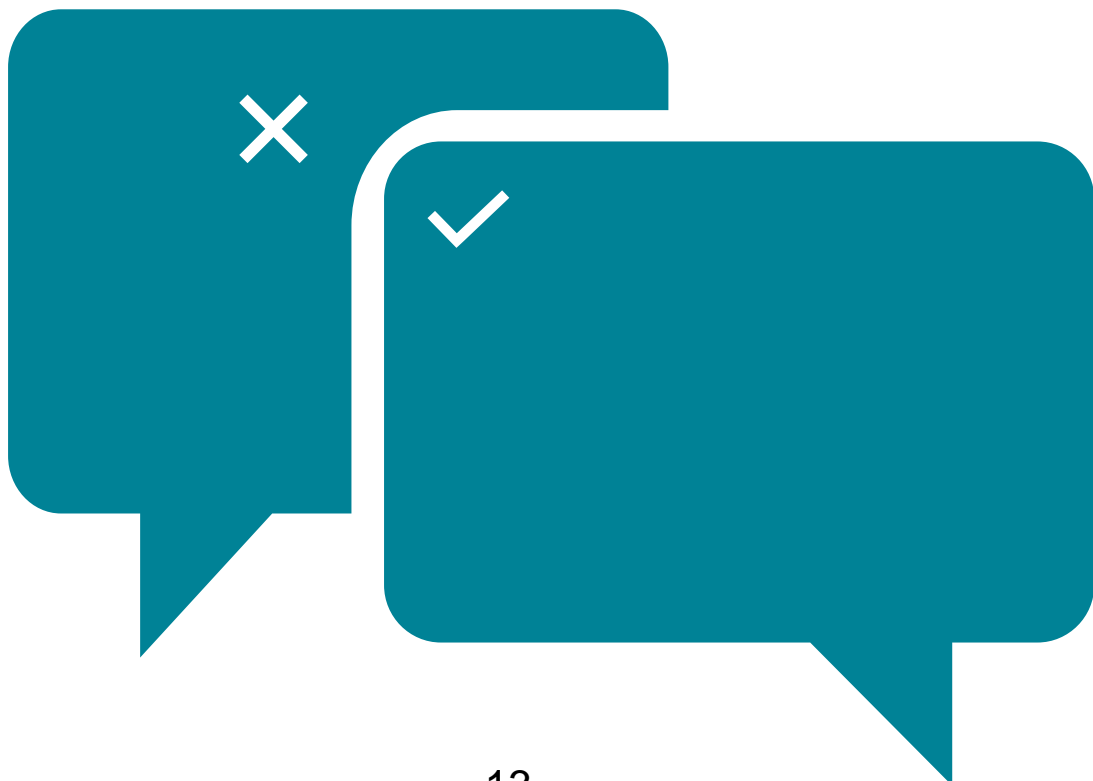


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1. Introduction

- 1.1 New Forest District Council ('the Council') is committed to providing residents, tenants and our communities with quality services. However, sometimes things do go wrong. We encourage people to tell us when this happens so we can put things right, explain what has happened, learn from our mistakes and improve our services.
- 1.2 We have a **Corporate Complaints Procedure** which we follow for complaints that are made to the Council. This process is managed by the Information Governance and Complaints Team.
- 1.3 Our approach to complaint handling is also in line with the Council's **Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 for people, place and prosperity** and our values: LEAF:
- **Learning**: we use complaints as an opportunity to learn from our mistakes.
 - **Empathy**: we show empathy to complainants.
 - **Ambition**: we have ambition to improve our services where it is identified that someone has not received the standard of service that they should have.
 - **Fairness**: we are fair to complainants and residents in our complaint handling.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to provide a half yearly update on the complaints we have received during the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024, highlighting key themes, trends and volumes recognising that accountability and transparency are integral to a positive complaint handling culture.

2. Complaint Handling Codes

Background

- 2.1 There are two Ombudsman services with jurisdiction over our complaint handling: The Housing Ombudsman for complaints from our tenants relating to the Council in its capacity as their landlord, and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman with jurisdiction over all other complaints.
- 2.2 The Housing Ombudsman has a statutory power, in accordance with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, to issue a statutory code of practice and a statutory duty to monitor compliance with this code.
- 2.3 Accordingly, the Housing Ombudsman has issued a **statutory Complaint Handling Code**. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has also issued a **non-statutory Complaint Handling Code** which aligns closely with the Housing Ombudsman's code. Both codes took effect on 1 April 2024.

Self-Assessment

- 2.4 There is a requirement within both codes for us to carry out annual self-assessments to ensure our complaints procedure complies with the codes.
- 2.5 There is a further requirement in the Housing Ombudsman's code that this self-assessment is approved by our governing body (Cabinet), at least annually.
- 2.6 The self-assessments should also be published on the complaints section of our website. Our self-assessments against both codes are published here: **[Feedback, comments and complaints - New Forest District Council](#)**.

Annual complaints performance and service improvement report requirement

- 2.7 We must also produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge.
- 2.8 The annual report prepared for the year 2023/2024 is published online, here: **Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023/24** ('the Annual Report').
- 2.9 The Annual Report was approved by the Members Responsible for Complaints ('MRCs'), acting on behalf of the Cabinet:
- Housing and Homelessness Portfolio Holder – Housing complaints
 - Finance and Corporate Portfolio Holder – All other complaints
- 2.10 The MRC's formal response to the Annual Report, on behalf of Cabinet, is published, here: **Feedback, comments and complaints - New Forest District Council**
- 2.11 In future years the annual complaints performance and service improvement report and Cabinet's response will be approved by full Cabinet.

Housing Ombudsman Submission

- 2.12 The Housing Ombudsman requires that we submit a copy of our self-assessment, annual complaints performance and service improvement report and Cabinet's response for the preceding financial year to it by 30 June each year.
- 2.13 The Annual Report for the year 2023/2024 was submitted in accordance with this deadline.

3. Our procedure

3.1 We currently operate a 2 stage **Corporate Complaints Procedure** for all complaints.

3.2 The process followed since 1 April 2024 is set out below:

Stage	Responsible Officer	Steps and Timescales
1	Service Manager (in consultation with Assistant Director/Strategic Director as applicable). The Assistant Director or Strategic Director may personally deal with a complaint at stage 1 at their discretion.	Complaint received. Complaint acknowledged within 5 working days by the Information Governance and Complaints Team. This acknowledgement will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcome the complainant is seeking. Complainant informed of officer dealing with complaint and expected response date. Complainant requested to clarify complaint and desired outcome if this is not clear. Stage 1 response sent within 10 working days of the acknowledgement advising the complainant of the right to escalate the complaint by contacting the Information Governance and Complaints Team (complaints@nfdc.gov.uk). The response will also advise the complainant of their right to escalate their complaint to the relevant Ombudsman when they have exhausted this Procedure.
2	Monitoring Officer on behalf of the Chief Executive.	Request to escalate complaint received. Escalation request acknowledged within 5 working days by the Information Governance and Complaints Team. This acknowledgement will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcome the complainant is seeking. Complainant informed of officer dealing with complaint and expected response date. Stage 2 response sent within 20 working days of the acknowledgement advising the complainant that they have completed this Procedure, and they are entitled to refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or, for Housing Complaints (by Council tenants/ leaseholders about the Council as their landlord), the Housing Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied.

3.3 These stages and timescales meet the requirements of the codes.

7

Half Yearly Update Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report | Information Governance and Complaints | 1.4.2024-30.9.2024

4. Structure

4.1 We recognise the importance of this report providing a clear half yearly update on all our complaint handling. As with the Annual Report, we have chosen to produce one report that covers all our service areas, which can be considered by our overview and scrutiny panels and Cabinet. We have structured the analysis sections of this report as follows:

- All complaints (section 5)
- Complaints from tenants to the Council as its landlord (section 6)
- Complaints not accepted (section 7)
- Learning (section 8)
- Ombudsman decisions (section 9)
- Compliments (section 10)
- Conclusion (section 11)

5. All complaints


Summary – 1 April 2024-30 September 2024

125 125 complaints received


Complaints received


42 42 / 125 complaints received relate to a single planning matter

Complaints relate to one issue

 The half year position shows complaints are increasing

 No Enforcement & Amenities complaints

 Increase in Waste and Transport complaints

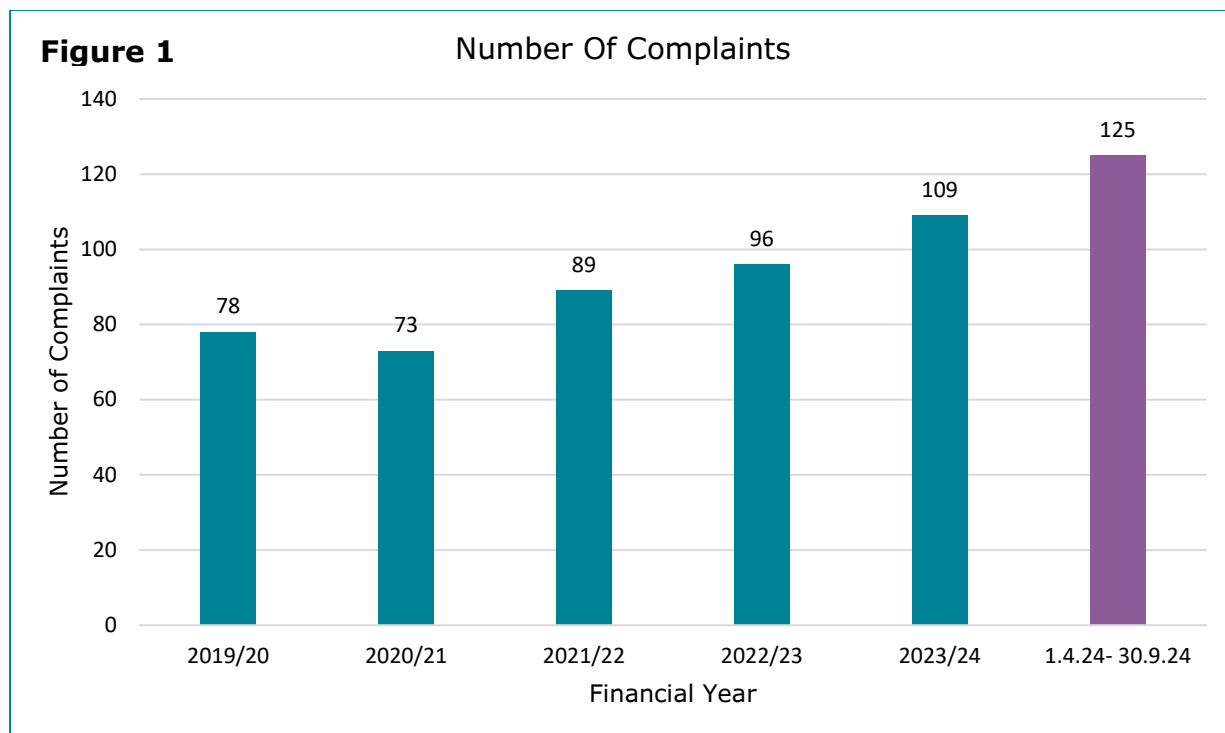
 Lower proportion of complaints upheld (41% compared to 53% for 2023/24)

 97% of stage 1 and 100% of stage 2 complaints responded to within procedure timescales

Analysis

Numbers

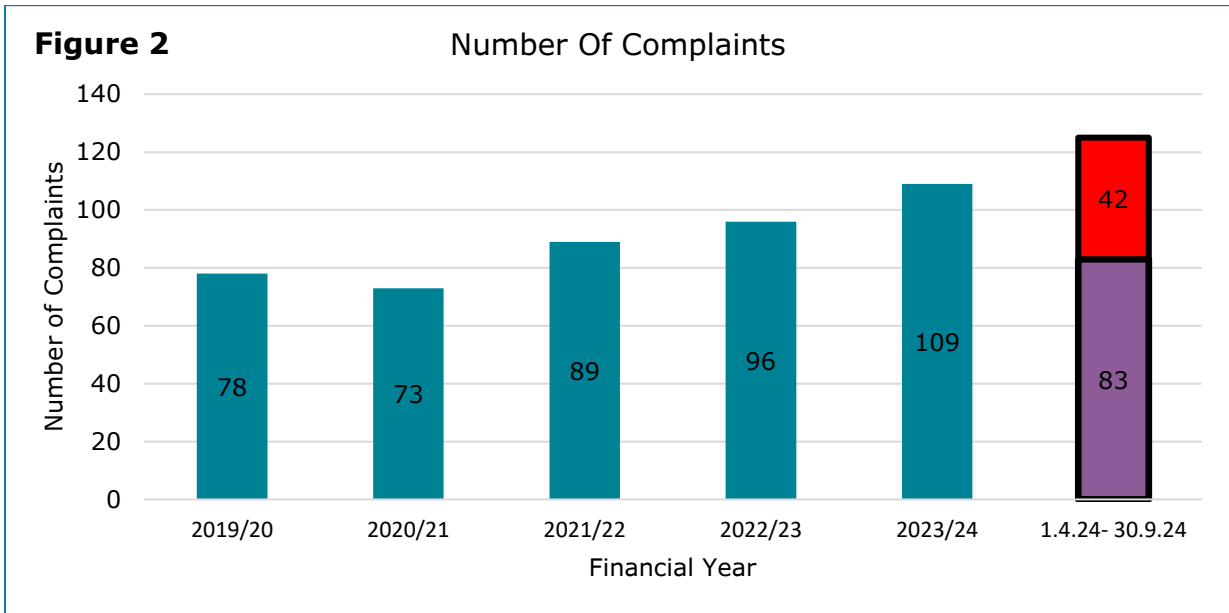
5.1 **Figure 1** below shows the total number of new complaints received by year with the half year position included in purple:



5.2 The half yearly total complaint figure currently exceeds the full year position for 2023/24. However, the Council has received 42 separate complaints that relate to one planning matter which has impacted these totals.

5.3 The total of 125 includes 2 complaints that were started at stage 2.

5.4 **Figure 2** overleaf is an updated version of **Figure 1** with these planning complaints demarked:

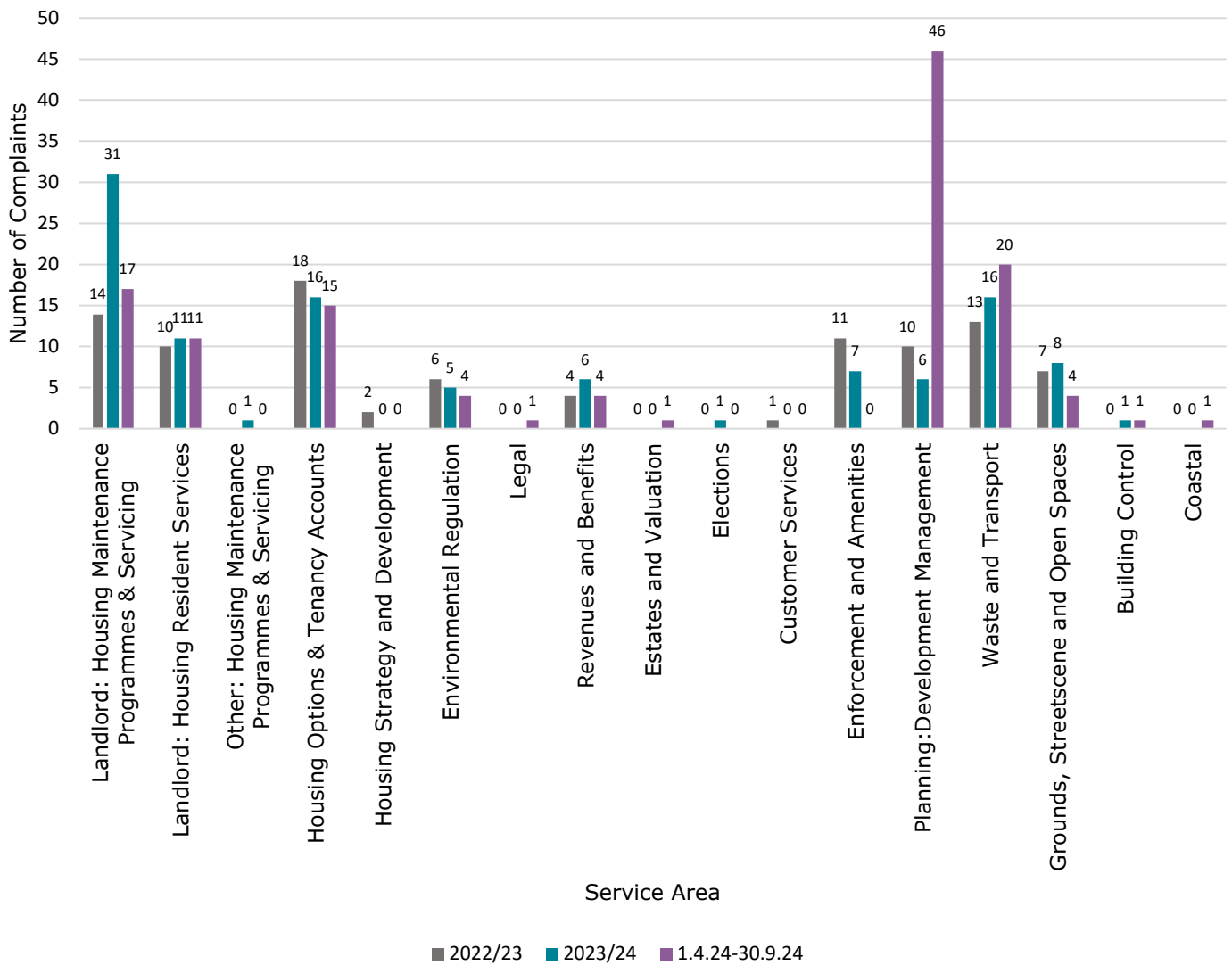


5.5 With the particular planning complaints identified in paragraph 5.2 above discounted for the purposes of comparison, the total of 83 complaints for the half year position shows that the trend in the total number of complaints is still increasing.

5.6 **Figure 3** overleaf shows the total number of complaints received for 2022/23, 2023/24 and the half year position, broken down by service area:

Figure 3

Comparison of Complaints by Service Area



5.7 The service areas with the largest increase in complaints for the half year period are Planning: Development Management, with a total of 46 complaints compared to 6 for the full year 2023/24 and Waste and Transport, with a total of 20 complaints compared to 16 for the full year 2023/24.

5.8 The reason for the significant increase in the Planning: Development Management complaints relates to the 42 complaints received regarding one planning matter as referred to at paragraph 5.2 above.

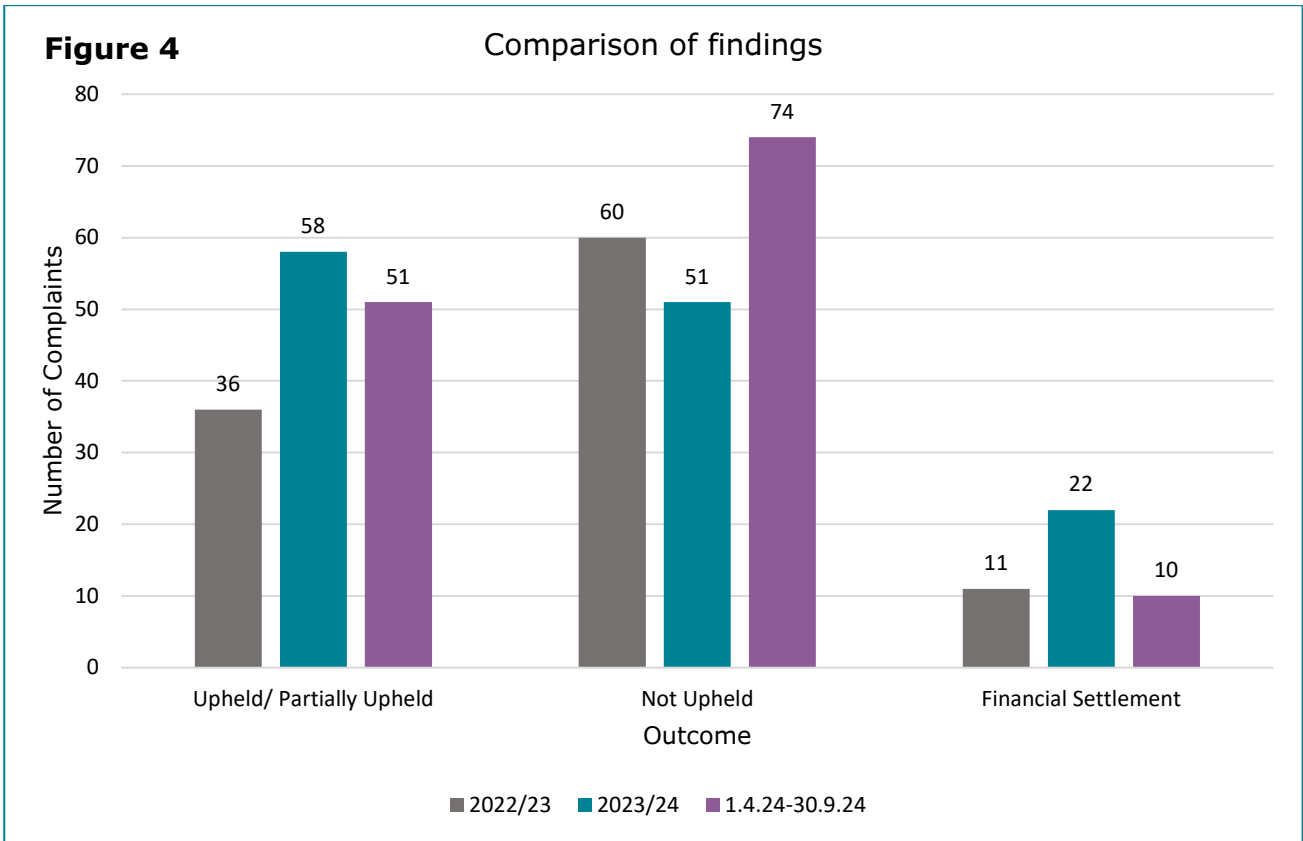
5.9 Of the 20 Waste and Transport complaints received for the half year period, 9 (45%) relate to the Council's garden waste service. From 1 April 2024, the Council introduced a new garden waste service using wheelie bins. This was a significant service change and during the first few months, after the new service was implemented, an increase in service requests and complaints was expected. For context, there are over 23,000 residents who have joined the new garden waste service. Additionally, 6 (30%) Waste and Transport complaints relate to issues with refuse bags being piled up and/or attacked by wildlife. A new domestic waste collection service is due to be rolled out across the District from summer 2025 which will involve the introduction of wheelie bins in accordance with our [Waste Strategy 2022 to 2027](#). One of the benefits of this service change is that it should alleviate issues related to the collection of refuse bags.

5.10 Several other service areas are showing the same or a similar number of complaints at the half year position, when compared to the full year 2023/24. This is in keeping with the general trend showing an increase in complaints received.

5.11 The service area showing the largest improvement in complaints at the half year position is Enforcement and Amenities who have received no complaints, compared with 7 for the full year 2023/24.

Complaint findings

5.12 **Figure 4** overleaf shows the number of complaints that were upheld or not upheld for 2022/23, 2023/24 and during the half year period covered by this report. It also shows the number of complaints that resulted in some form of financial settlement (including goodwill/time and trouble payments and compensation for losses). **Figures 4** and **5** include information based on responses sent by 21 October 2024, when this report was prepared.



5.13 **Figure 5** overleaf shows the percentage of complaints that have been upheld/ partially upheld and not upheld in 2022/23, 2023/24 and during the half year period covered by this report.

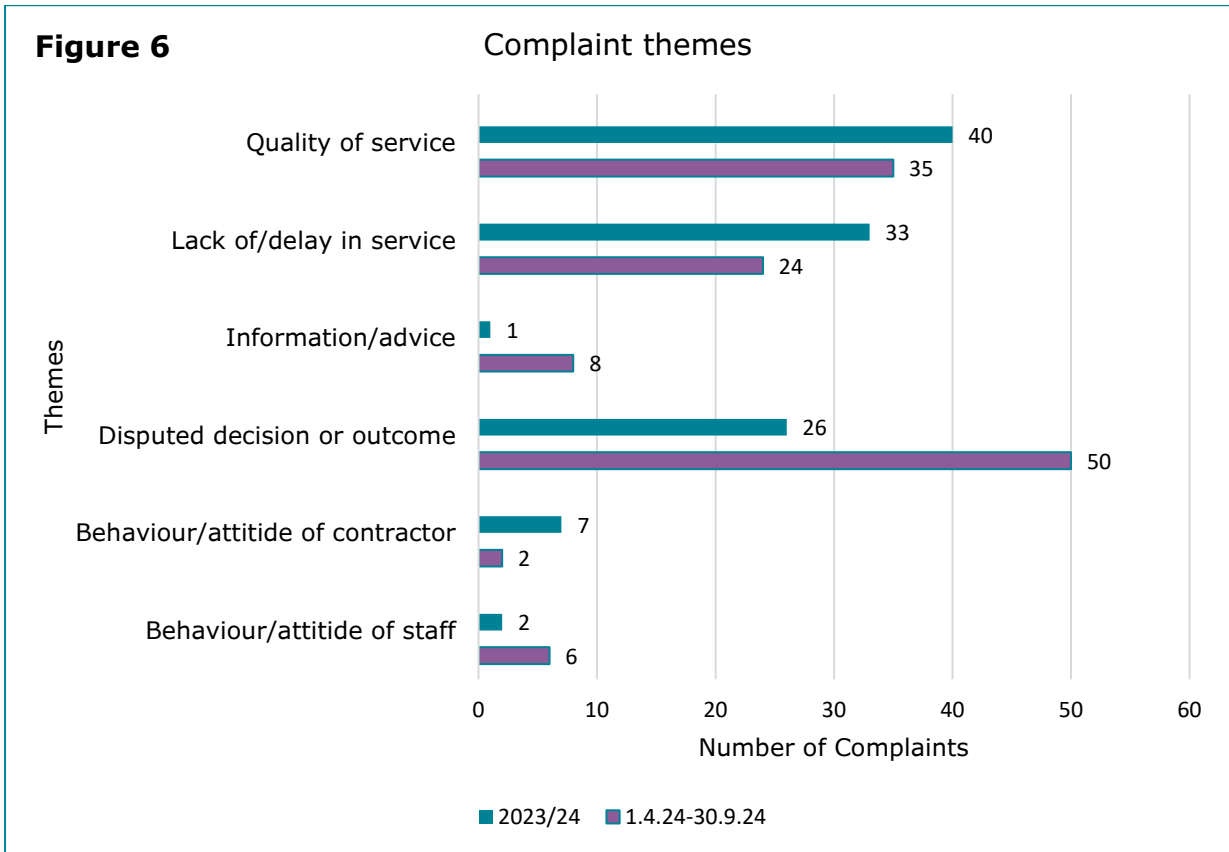
Figure 5



5.14 There has been a decrease in the proportion of complaints that have been upheld/partially upheld from 2023/24 (53%) compared to the half year position (41%).

Themes

5.15 **Figure 6** overleaf shows the complaints we have received in 2023/24 and at the half year position categorised by theme.

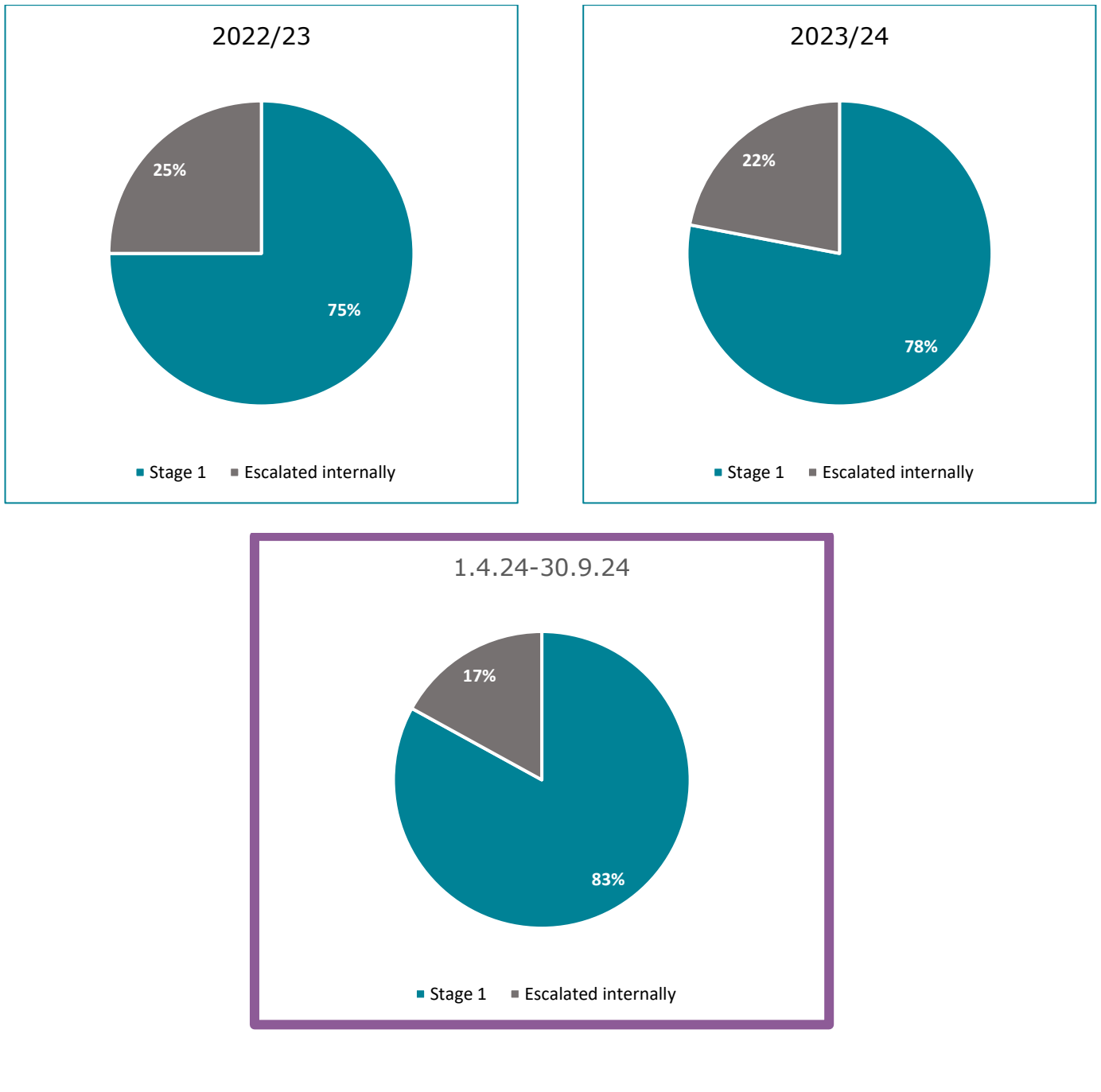


5.16 For the half year period the most common type of complaint has related to a disputed decision or outcome (40%). This is due to the planning complaints referred to at paragraph 5.2 above. This is followed by complaints related to quality of service received (28%) and lack of/delay in service (19%). There are some instances where complaints relate to more than one issue, but these have been categorised based on the most prevalent theme.

Stages

5.17 **Figure 7** overleaf shows the percentage of complaints that were either resolved at stage 1 or escalated to stage 2 of the corporate complaints procedure. This will not include the 2 complaints that were started at stage 2 but does include any stage 2 complaints that were escalated during the half year period (including where the stage 1 complaint may have been received in 2023/24).

Figure 7



5.18 The extent to which complaints escalate through the corporate complaints procedure is an important measure, as it is preferable to find resolutions for complainants at the earliest possible stage. As shown in **Figure 7**, the majority of complaints in the half year period (83%) were resolved at stage 1 and therefore only 17% of all complaints were escalated internally, compared with 22% in 2023/24.

Timescales

5.19 In 2023/24 100% of complaints were responded to within the timescales included in the corporate complaints procedure that was applicable at that time.


5.20 For the half year period, 97% of stage 1 complaints and 100% of stage 2 complaints were responded to within the timescales included in the corporate complaints procedure as detailed at paragraph 3.2 above or with an agreed extension in accordance with the codes.


6. Complaints from tenants


Summary – 1 April 2024-30 September 2024

28
Complaints received
28 complaints received from tenants

%
61% of tenant complaints relate to Housing Maintenance, Programmes and Servicing


Decrease in the proportion of complaints being upheld (54% compared to 69% for 2023/24)


The half year position shows tenant complaints are increasing


Most common themes for tenant complaints are quality of service (36%) and lack of/delay in service (36%)

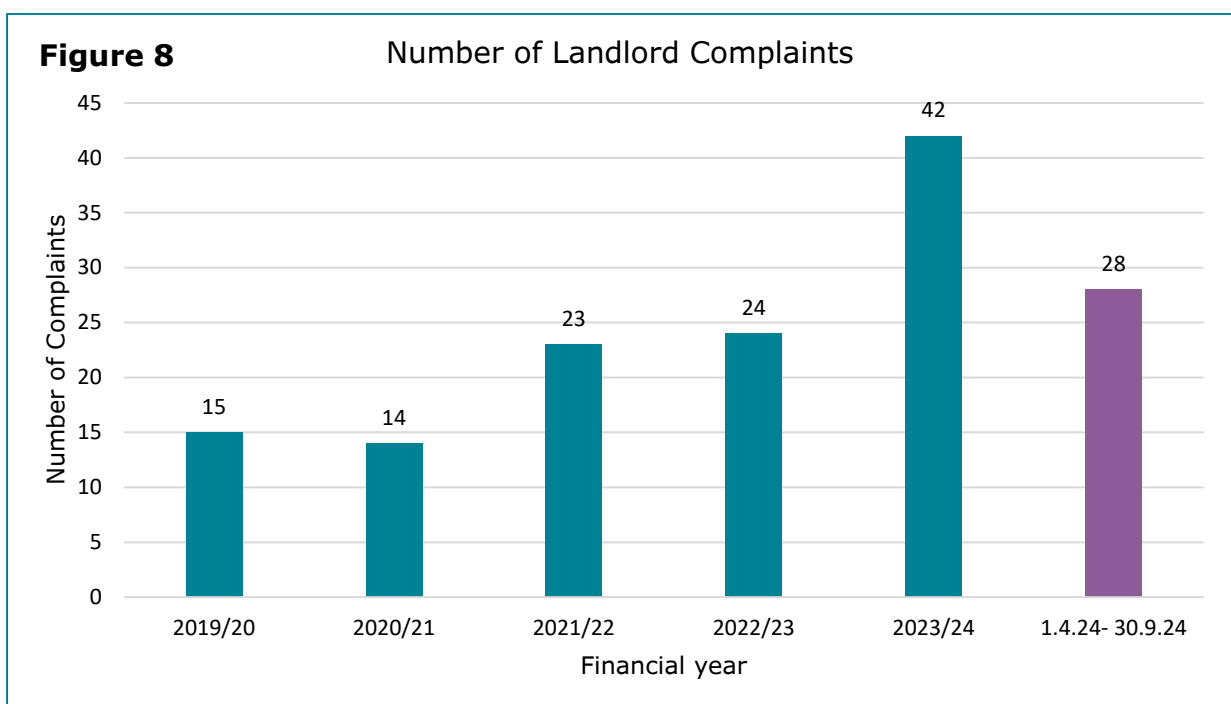

96% of stage 1 and 100% of stage 2 complaints responded to within procedure timescales

Analysis

Numbers

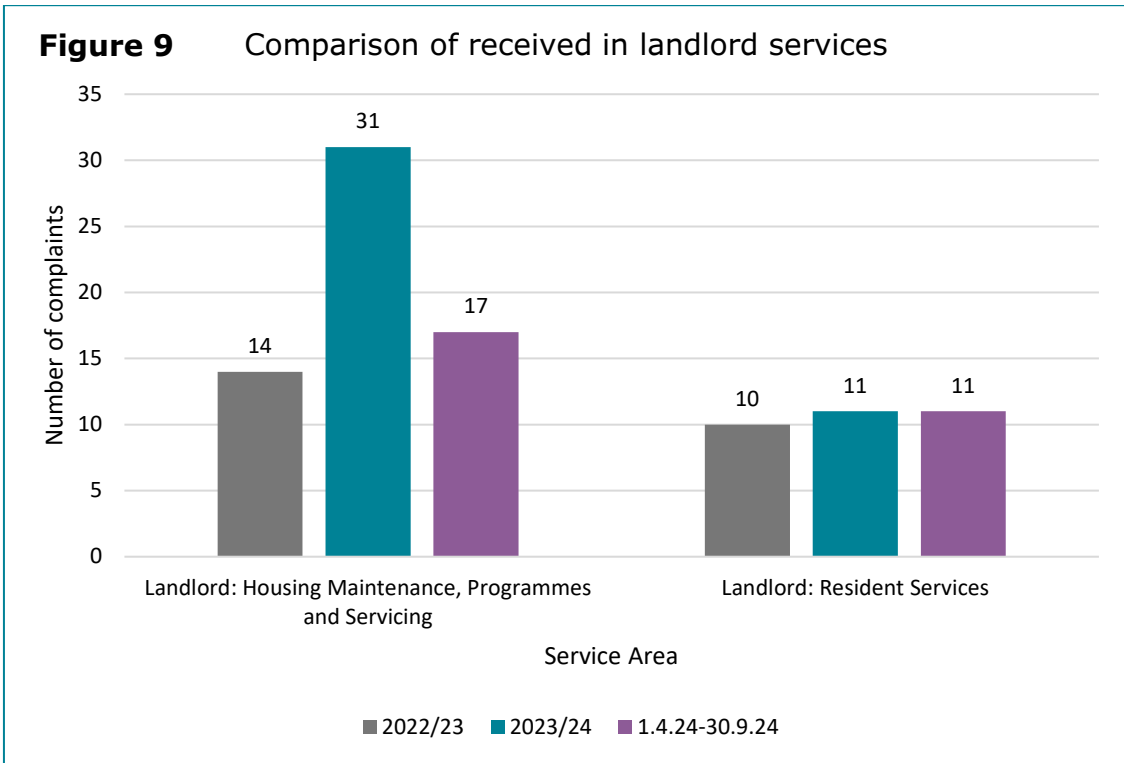
6.1 As of the end of 2023/24 we had 5,285 Council properties that we either owned or managed and let to tenants.

6.2 **Figure 8** below shows the total number of new complaints received by year from tenants to us in our capacity as their landlord with the half year position included in purple:

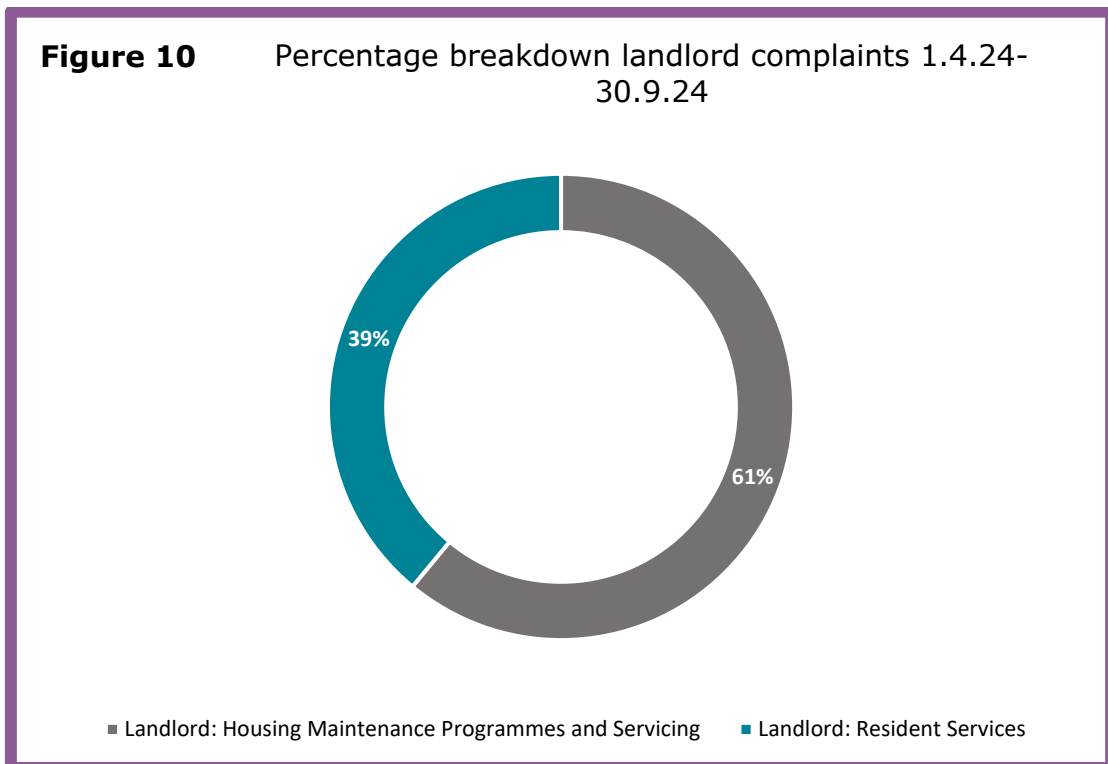


6.3 At the half year position, 28 complaints have been received by the Council from tenants in its capacity as their landlord.

6.4 **Figure 9** overleaf breaks down the landlord services complaints received by service area.



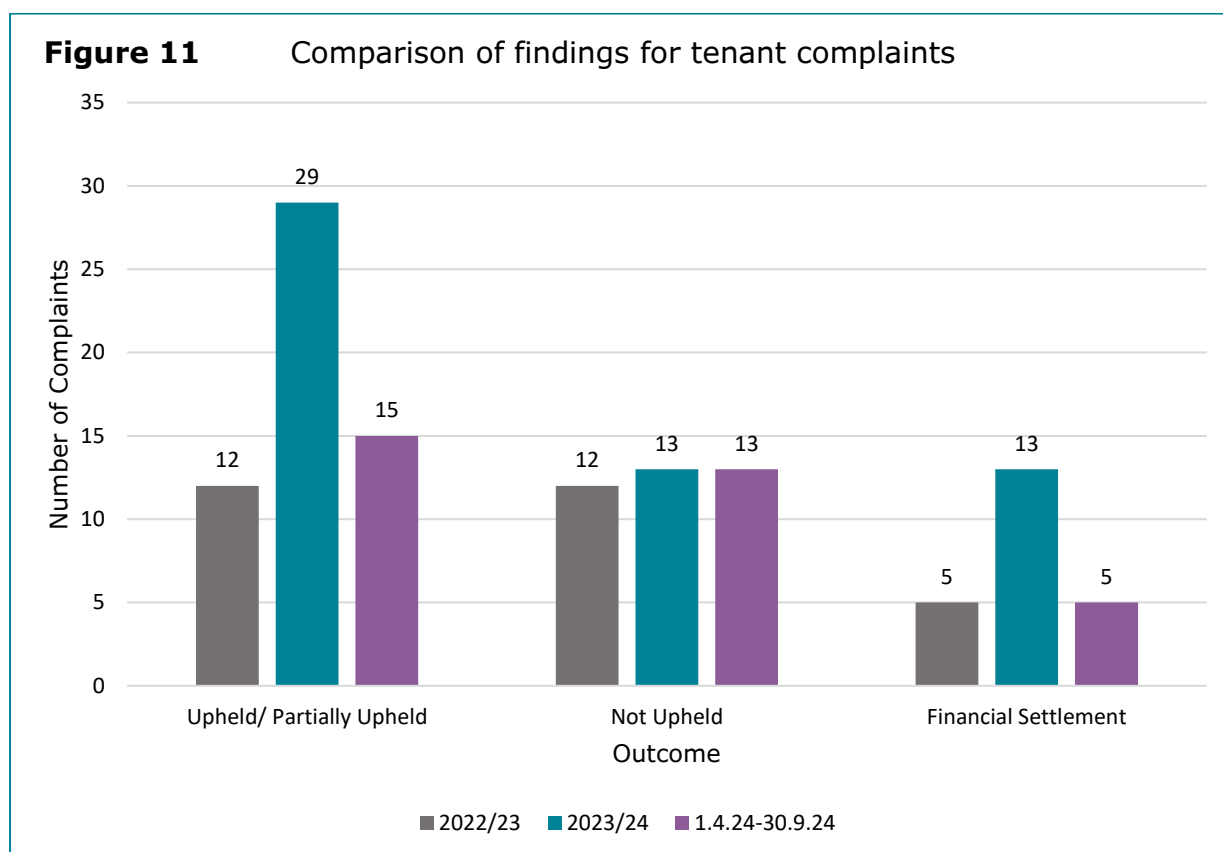
6.5 The percentage breakdown of complaints relating to landlord services for the half year period is shown in **Figure 10** below:



6.6 This compares to 26% for Landlord: Resident Services and 74% for Landlord: Housing Maintenance Programmes and Services for the year 2023/24.

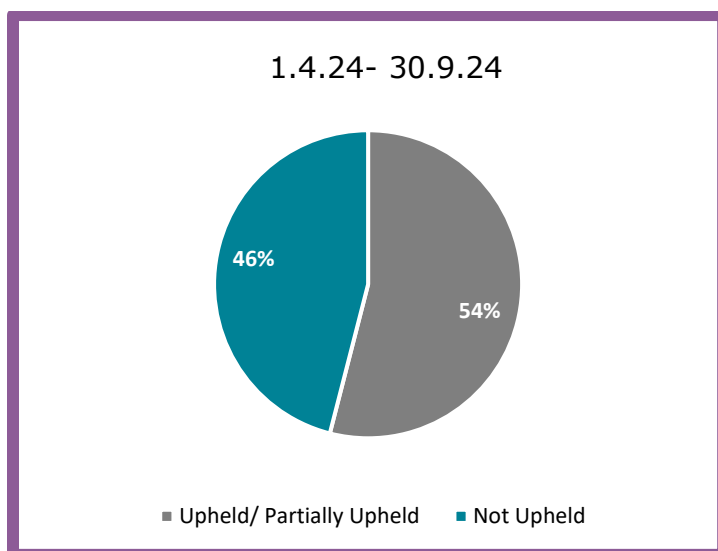
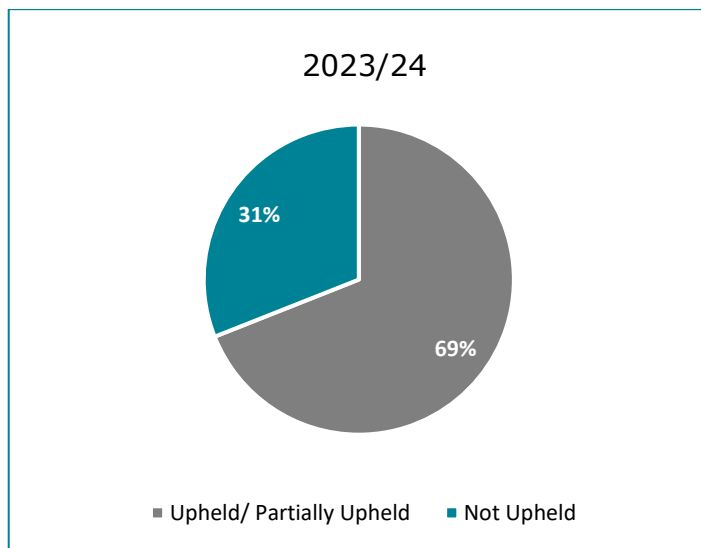
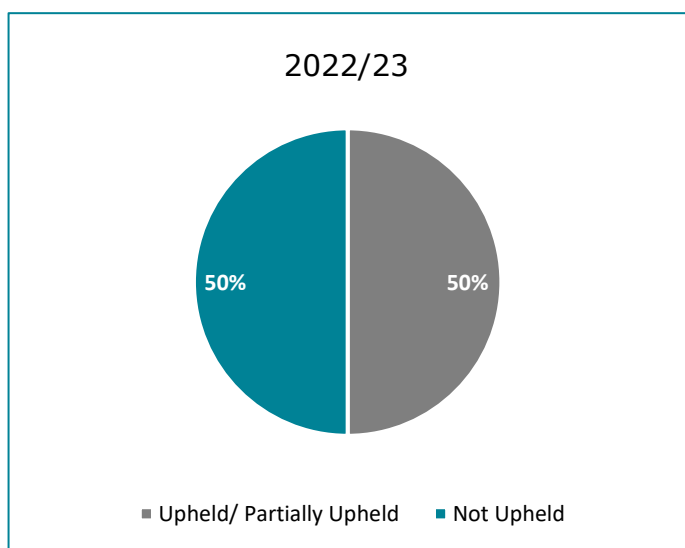
Complaint findings

6.7 **Figure 11** below shows the number of tenant complaints that were upheld or not upheld for 2022/23 compared to 2023/24 and at the half year position. It also shows the number of complaints that resulted in some form of financial settlement (including goodwill/time and trouble payments and compensation for losses).



6.8 **Figure 13** below shows the percentage of tenant complaints that have been upheld/ partially upheld and not upheld in 2022/23, 2023/24 and during the half year period covered by this report.

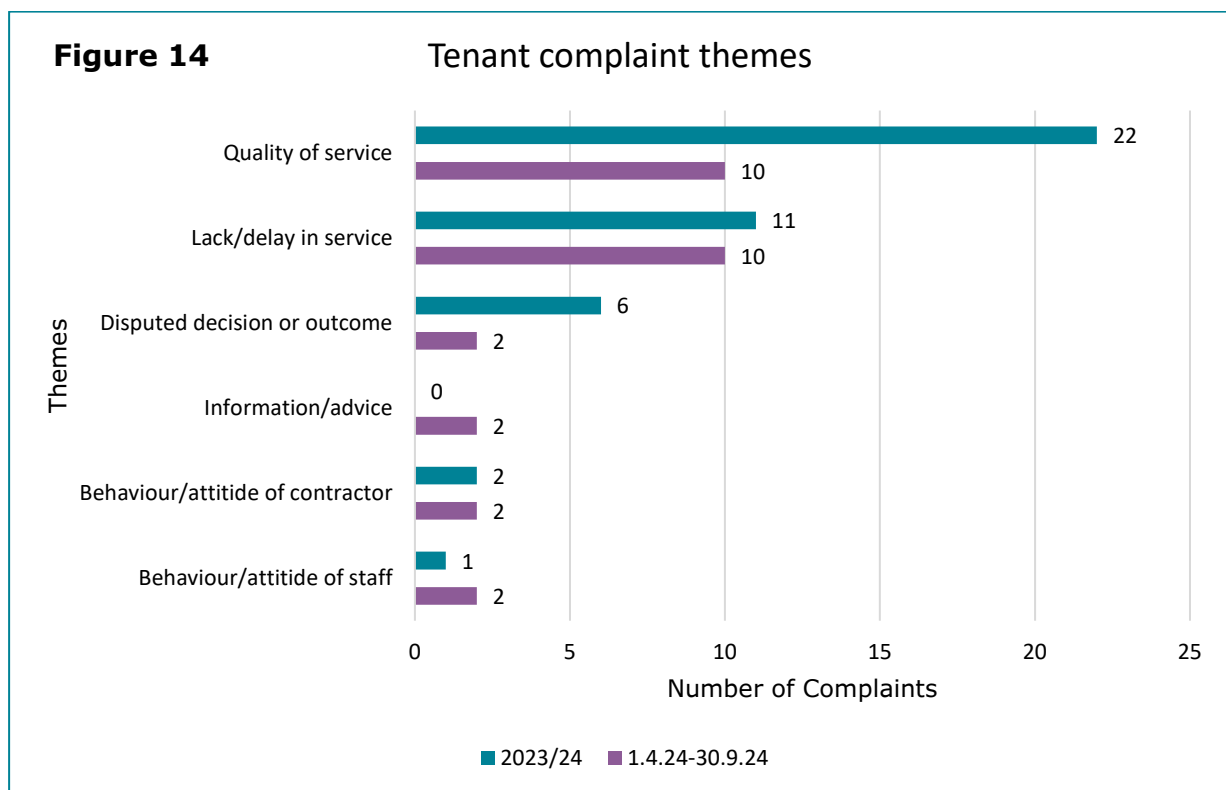
Figure 13



6.9 There has been a decrease in the proportion of tenant complaints that have been upheld/partially upheld at the half year position (54%) compared to 2023/24 (69%).

Themes

6.10 **Figure 14** below shows the tenant complaints we have received in 2023/24 and at the half year position categorised by theme.

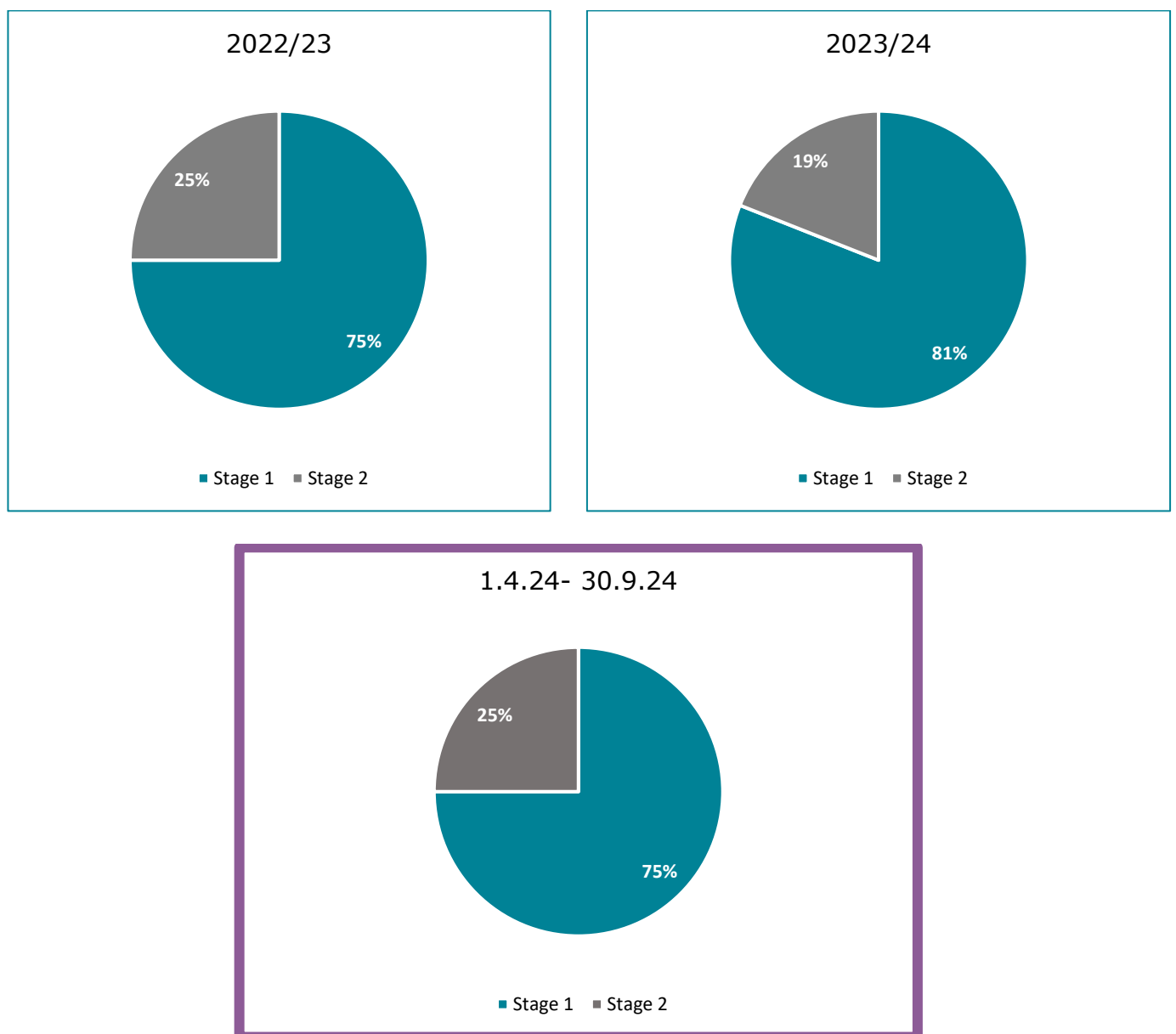


6.11 The most common types of tenant complaint have related to the quality of service received and lack of/delay in service (36% each). There are some instances where tenant complaints relate to more than one issue, but these have been categorised based on the most prevalent theme.

Stages

6.12 **Figure 15** below shows the percentage of tenant complaints that were either resolved at stage 1 or escalated to stage 2 of the corporate complaints procedure. This includes any stage 2 complaints that were escalated during the half year period (including where the stage 1 complaint may have been received in 2023/24).

Figure 15



6.13 The majority of tenant complaints at the half year position were resolved at stage 1 (75%).

Timescales

6.14 In 2023/24 100% of tenant complaints were responded to within the timescales included in the corporate complaints procedure that was applicable at that time.

6.15 For the half year period, 96% of stage 1 tenant complaints and 100% of stage 2 complaints were responded to within the timescales included in the corporate complaints procedure as included at paragraph 3.2 above or with an agreed extension in accordance with the complaint handling codes.

7. Complaints not accepted

- 7.1 Our corporate complaints procedure sets out what will not be considered as a corporate complaint.
- 7.2 This includes, but is not limited to, complaints against councillors, anonymous complaints, cases where other legal rights of appeal/review exist, or cases where we or the complainant has started legal proceedings.
- 7.3 Where we decide that a complaint cannot be dealt with as a corporate complaint, we will let the complainant know and advise them of their right to take that decision to the relevant Ombudsman.
- 7.4 During the half year period covered by this report, the following complaints were not accepted in accordance with the corporate complaints procedure:

Nature of complaint	Reason not a corporate complaint (section 4.2 of corporate complaints procedure)
Complaint regarding recovery of parking ticket fine	'cases where other legal rights of appeal/review exist, including complaints about a Penalty Charge Notice (parking ticket) or recovery action taken after the issue of the ticket'
Complaint regarding refusal to write off a debt	'Complaints which have already exhausted this Procedure'

- 7.5 We also have complaints that are not dealt with as corporate complaints because they are service requests. Our procedure includes the following regarding service requests:

'Service requests where an individual is requiring the Council to take action to put something right.'

- *Such service requests will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.*
- *Where an individual expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, a complaint will be raised. Efforts to address the service request will continue.'*

7.6 Some service requests are received by the Information Governance and Complaints Team for allocation to the relevant service, but many service requests will be received directly by services.

8. Learning

8.1 We recognise the importance of learning from complaints. Below are some examples of service improvements that have been made as a result of complaints dealt with during 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024:

Case Study 1 – Environment and Regulation - Licensing

The complaint

A complaint was made regarding delays in the processing of a pleasure boat licensing application and requesting additional information from the applicant.

What did we do?

It was considered that the application was processed in a reasonable time, but the review of the complaint identified that the Council's website did not inform applicants of response and processing times. Further information was added to the website and internal guidance updated to require contact with an applicant if required information is missing from an application.

What is the ongoing service improvement?

Increasing transparency in the licensing process and managing applicants' expectations will improve the standard of service for pleasure boat licence applicants.

Case Study 2 – Landlord: Resident Services

The complaint

A complaint was made that the Council was trying to recover rent for a period of time after the tenant believed they had terminated their tenancy and left the property, but had not left vacant possession. The reason for leaving the property related to concerns about the behaviour of person who remained.

What did we do?

An update was added to standard letters advising tenants of the requirements regarding the end of tenancy process to include vacant possession. Steps will be taken to review and update policies and procedures relating to end of tenancy and vacant possession, particularly where disclosures regarding the behaviour of someone living at the property are made.

What is the ongoing service improvement?

Having updated policies and procedures will improve consistency and the support/signposting provided to tenants. Making sure information provided to tenants is up to date and complete will assist with managing expectations.

Case Study 3 – Environment and Regulation - Environmental Protection

The complaint

A complaint was received regarding the handling of alleged noise nuisance.

What did we do?

Whilst it was considered that the investigation had been handled appropriately, it was identified that further information regarding the statutory nuisance investigation process should be published on the Council's website.

What is the ongoing service improvement?

Increasing transparency in the statutory nuisance investigation process will improve the customer experience.

Case Study 4 – Landlord: Housing Maintenance, Programmes and Servicing

The complaint

A complaint was received from a tenant relating to repair issues at their property. This included that some agreed drainage works that were identified several years ago had not been completed and that other issues had been raised on multiple occasions before being rectified.

What did we do?

We apologised for the delays and steps were taken to progress these works. Steps have been taken to avoid repair works being missed through introduction of more comprehensive housing management software. We have introduced reporting to raise alerts for multiple repair requests or repeat repair requests so that issues can be resolved sooner.

What is the ongoing service improvement?

Improved software and alerts will increase repair requests being actioned without delay.

9. Ombudsman decisions

Summary – 1 April 2024-30 September 2024



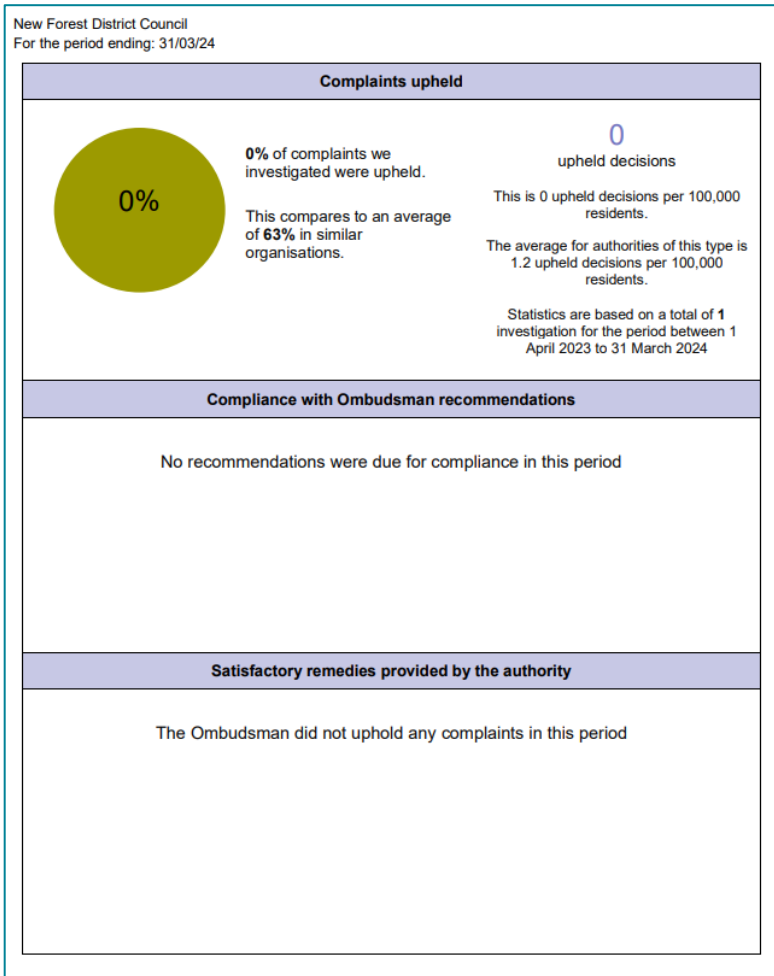
Right to escalate

- 9.1 If complainants are not satisfied with our response to their complaint, when they have exhausted our internal corporate complaints procedure, they can escalate their complaint to either the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or, for tenants, the Housing Ombudsman.
- 9.2 Both Ombudsman services will generally not investigate complaints unless the complainant has completed our internal procedure. However, complainants can contact the relevant Ombudsman at any stage during their complaint.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

Annual review letter

- 9.3 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman provides us with an annual review letter each year in July which includes a summary of complaint statistics for complaints which have escalated to them. This covers the preceding financial year.
- 9.4 Our annual review letter for 2023/24 was not available at the time the Annual Report was prepared. The complaint statistics from the 2023/24 letter are shown below:



9.5 The annual review letter for 2023/24, and previous years, is published on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s website: [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman - New Forest District Council Annual Reviews](#).

9.6 Our performance is also viewable on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s website: [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman - New Forest District Council Performance](#)

Investigations and findings

9.7 We are not always aware of every complaint or enquiry that is made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

9.8 Our records show that there has been 1 complaint decided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, during the half year period covered by this report, related to the Council. This was closed after initial enquiries.

Housing Ombudsman

Performance report

9.9 The Housing Ombudsman publishes individual landlord performance reports for landlords with 5 or more findings for a particular financial year. These reports are available on the Housing Ombudsman's website: [Housing Ombudsman - Landlords Archive](#)

9.10 There is no landlord performance report relating to the Council currently published on the Housing Ombudsman's website.

Investigations and findings

9.11 As with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, we are not always aware of every complaint or enquiry that is made to the Housing Ombudsman.

9.12 Our records show that there have been no determinations made by the Housing Ombudsman, during the half year period covered by this report, related to the Council.

10.Compliments

10.1 It is important to recognise the good work that officers of the Council do, as well as identifying where improvements can be made.

10.2 Managers and officers are encouraged to pass on compliments and positive feedback that has been received. A compliments inbox (compliments@nfdc.gov.uk) has been set up to assist with this.

10.3 Below are anonymised examples of the positive feedback that has been received by some of our service areas during the half year period covered by this report.

Landlord: Housing Maintenance, Programmes and Servicing

“ Many thanks for the repair carried out this morning by xx. He has done his usual great job, very much appreciated”.

“ Tenant called and said ‘He ... was very happy with the service and input he received from us...”

“A big thank you for the fencing work we have just had completed”

“ I just wanted to say that the team carrying out the work on the soakaway have done an excellent job.”

“Tenant called in she is thrilled and really full of praise for the works we completed today. She would like to pass on her thanks to the worker and commend his wonderful craftsman ship.”

“The tenant from xx has called in to say she is really happy with works xx has done today and how nice polite and helpful he has been 😊”

"Whilst doing building checks at xx, I bumped into the tenant in xx, who has lived at this address for 10 years. He praised me and NFDC for the work we are doing and said he and his family was 110% happy with where they are and the work we do – we fix problems very quickly"

"I had workman here Monday I must say xx so polite and helpful ... He is a lovely man! Please pass this onto his boss please!"

" Tenant has called in to the Hub this morning to pass on her thanks and compliments to our operative xx for all his hard work in the back garden, she is extremely grateful."

" I would also inform you that the workman who came was absolutely wonderful he worked so quickly and soon was able to find the problem after many tries. Definitely someone to keep on your 'book's'. Thank you again."

" Compliments given over the phone to operative xx for a job he was on yesterday, at xx Tenant noted xx is a very hardworking man and should get recognition as such. All is done to a very high standard..."

"... I wanted to say that he was both very friendly and efficient at his job; he made me feel very much at ease, and also made sure to explain what he'd just done afterwards clearly. He basically did everything just the way you'd hope it would be, and as such I thought it important to pass on my compliments, and give full credit where it's due. If you could pass on these thoughts, thanks and best wishes, it would be much appreciated.."

" I would like to thank the three guys who came one last week and two today who were lovely guys and did a great job. Especially thank you xx for a brilliant job..."

"Xx called the Hub this afternoon to pass on her thanks and compliments to both the call taker and the tradesman who helped her today..."

"Thank you to kitchen fitter (contractor) I can never thank you enough for the care and respect they gave me whilst they carried out to work on my kitchen. They put my needs above the work. They have kept me informed and each and every day they have made sure I was safe They left the kitchen clear of trip hazards..."

" Tenant called regarding her replacement driveway.

She said that everyone at NFDC and our contractors had all 'gone above and beyond' and 'gone out of their way to make everything easier' for her. She is absolutely delighted with the work and with the way she has been treated all along..."

" I would like to convey my grateful thanks to xx and his workforce for being so thorough, so kind and considerate to my needs. xx went above and beyond ...he ensured his crew did the same. Amazing workers and nothing was too much trouble."

Landlord: Resident Services

" I would like to say thank you. The property on xx road is beautiful, it's everything I hoped for it really is. I have accepted the flat and we sign the tenancy agreement tomorrow! I am very delighted to be able to relax and not have to worry all of the time. You have helped me in many ways, you have listened to me and have taken my situation into consideration and you did all you could to give me an amazing place to live with all of the beautiful surroundings. I am excited to move into the property."

"xx, again I must reiterate that every day I go and visit Mum and every time she is in her kitchen and singing your praises! The kitchen refit has made such a massive difference to her, not only physically, but mentally as well!"

" Two residents at xx would like to offer feedback on xx, the regular cleaner. 'she's great, she does a fantastic job' they were very pleased with the regular cleaning that she does!"

"I've just had a chat with xx and she wanted me to convey her thanks to all the team who helped xx and those who have given their assistance to her over the last week. xx said that it's been a great help to her and her children knowing xx was in great hands, and that he was very optimistic about the move on accommodation he'd been allocated.!"

"Hi xx, thank you for your time yesterday and the smooth and caring sign-up process."

"Mum of tenant, passes thanks through to xx for all her help..."

"Tenant wanted to pass on how lovely, helpful, and efficient everyone has been in dealing with all her recent issues and what an amazing and efficient service we provide. She is very happy."

" I would also like to thank you for your help and support at a very difficult time. "

Housing Options and Tenancy Accounts

"xx, I have to say a huge thank you to you for your help, advice, and reassurance during this nightmarish time...Thank you again,"

"Thank you, xx, you've been amazing at helping me"

" Thank you, xx, I really appreciate all that you're doing and helping us so much."

" Just want to say thank you for everything you have done for me and my children. It's much appreciated, thank you."

" xx, I Just like to say how jolly efficient and kind you have been. Well done and thank you..."

"xx, Thanks for your email, it has been a pleasure having a great contact in the New Forest."

"Tenant ...wanted to thank everybody involved with assisting her mum to be re-housed, she said she cannot believe the difference it has made to xx and how happy she now is...She asked for special thanks to xx as you showed her around ... she is now in a secure, safe place she loves,"

" Tenants both said how great and supportive you both have been, and they are very grateful for all your help.."

" Thank you, xx,... you have been a godsend in a really difficult time for me.."

"Thank you to xx-So great news!!!! Thanks a million!!!I wanted to say a huge thank you again for your help and participation!!! This is incredibly good news; we are very happy!..."

"Thank you for all your help."

" Me and my wife really grateful to you for your help! Without your assistance we can't proceed, previously we tried but unsuccessfully :(Thanks a million, to You!"

"Thank you for all your support"

" Thank you for your help with this application. In an age of social media and ever-increasing technology it is great to speak to someone who can and does help!"

"Thank you for sending me this amazing piece of news!...Its taken a massive weight from my shoulders and I should be able to finally get a good nights sleep tonight. Thank you so much for your help and advice."

"I really wanted to express my appreciation and thanks to the absolutely wonderful staff from the nfdc that have made such a difference along the way, xx from the allocation team has been not only incredibly helpful but empathetic and kind, she listened and really cared about my xx, her quick reactions and competence really did start this whole process..."

Community safety and support

“Hi just really wanted to say thank you again Thank you for today don't think you realise the difference you've just made!”

“I just wanted to say thank you for all your help, support and guidance over the past couple of years – I've loved working with you. The range of issues you deal with is immense and how you keep on top of it all is beyond me. There have been some real challenges as I'm sure there will continue to be – but I think some of the relationships and working arrangements we've put in place will only serve to make the partnership (and therefore the New Forest) stronger and safer.
Thanks again for everything”

Environmental and Regulation

“Thank you and a quick note to say how good an experience it has been to work with you and the team on the ground. Lots of useful advice by everyone, respectful and very customer friendly. You and the team are a shining light not just to the council, but business in general on how to engage with the general public...”

“ Thank you very much for this information and making sure we are all kept safe.”

“ THANKYOU , you are still my favourite Licensing authority !!”

“ Many thanks for your email. I think you should know that you are by far the easiest and most efficient Licensing team to deal with! Many thanks”

“ ...I just wanted to say again thanks to you and all concerned in Licensing ... every time I've communicated with NFDC you've all been super polite and helpful”

"I have had excellent service from licensing department over the past 13 years and thank you for the friendly and efficient way I have been looked after. "

" Thank you for your most kind letter of xx, which is much appreciated. "

Revenues and Benefits

"...I was met with another member of your staff, xx who again was patient, kind and incredibly efficient."

"... I just wanted to say again, thank you so much for keeping an eye on things with me and for the increased support... I am grateful for good people like yourself working in and around this process and your support is so very much appreciated Thank you, not just for me, but for my children, whose well being your are also assisting."

"...Many thanks for arranging this for me. The staff at Lymington made the whole process very easy please pass my thanks".

Coastal

"Please pass on my personal thanks to the NFDC team who provided so much information ... all the best to you and thanks again..."

" We are also very grateful for the coastal team - you have always given very prompt and thorough responses whenever we contacted you during our beach hut search"

Waste and Transport

“Thank you very much for your kind reply. The operatives work hard and at a pace. The new bins should solve it all.
I [would] like to say a huge thank you for resolving the issue of the domestic waste... Long may it continue”

“ Many thanks to the team ... They were really friendly and did a really great job, an asset to the council...”

“I have just had a visit from xx and write to state my gratitude for the swift and timely manner he dealt with my complaint.”

“We wanted to write to extend our gratitude to the refuse collectors...Our 2 year old boy, xx, eagerly awaits the bin collection every xx morning and loves to go out and watch the team collect our bins. They are always incredibly friendly with him and take the time to stop, wave and chat and let him see what they're doing. Please ensure [our] appreciation is shared with them and their line managers.”

11. Conclusion

11.1 This report provides a half yearly update on our complaint handling from 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024.

11.2 It is vital that complaints are responded to adequately and in a timely manner and that our corporate complaints procedure works effectively for both complainants and staff.

11.3 Complaints serve as one of the Council's most important intelligence sources and learning from complaints, and developing meaningful service improvements, will drive our complaints handling going forward. We will continue to work on the actions identified in the Annual Report to improve our complaint handling.

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Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel

21 November 2024

Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group – Outcome Report

Purpose	To review the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group’s recommendations and endorse them for carrying through to officer actions, other overview and scrutiny panels, or Cabinet or other committees as appropriate.
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	The Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group has reviewed the Council’s financial strategy and has sought to understand how the plans and assumptions made by the Portfolio Holders marry up with the overarching financial planning of the Council. This report presents the findings of the Group.
Recommendation(s)	That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel note the contents of the report and endorse the follow up actions for carrying through to officer actions, the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels, the Cabinet or other committees as appropriate.
Reasons for recommendation(s)	To provide assurance on the soundness of the overall financial strategy of each portfolio in supporting various workstreams, including maximisation of resources and delivery of corporate plan priorities.
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Jeremy Heron – Finance and Corporate
Strategic Director(s)	Alan Bethune – Corporate Resources S151 and Transformation
Officer Contact	Paul Whittles, Assistant Director – Finance 02380 285 766

Introduction and background

1. Further to the creation of the Financial Strategy Task and Finish group as endorsed at the 25 July 2024 Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel, this report sets out the purpose and work of the Group and presents a set of conclusions and recommendations. The Group met 7 times over September, October, and November 2024.

Terms of Reference

2. The terms of reference for the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group were:

'To gather an understanding of how the Council's overall financial strategy brings together various financial workstreams. This includes income maximisation and prioritisation of resources to ensure the delivery of the Council's priorities, and to challenge how the plans and assumptions made by the Portfolio Holders fit with the overall strategy.'

Membership of Group

3. The Group consisted of the following members:

Cllr Alan Alvey (Chairman)
Cllr Kate Crisell
Cllr Sean Cullen
Cllr Philip Dowd
Cllr David Hawkins
Cllr Joe Reilly
Cllr Steve Rippon-Swaine

Scope of Review

4. The Group received an overview of the Council's financial position, including the latest Medium Term Financial Plan and Annual Budget for 2024/25, for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.
5. Following a review of the data a suite of questions was determined with a series of generic questions for each Portfolio Holder, supplemented with some portfolio specific questions.

6. Each Portfolio Holder was then invited to present their responses to the group with further questions and challenge provided by the group members as part of the interview.
7. The generic questions asked to each Portfolio Holders were as follows:
 - a. Reflecting on the past 12 months through a financial lens, what have been your biggest achievements and challenges?
 - b. Looking ahead, what does the portfolio holder consider to be the main:
 - i. Pressures (and how can the portfolio mitigate the resultant negative financial impacts)?
 - ii. Opportunities (and how can the portfolio realise the connected financial benefits)?
 - iii. Objectives (in terms of significant projects / service delivery aspirations) over the next 12 months?
 - c. How is the portfolio holder supporting the corporate plan priorities and associated portfolio objectives over the medium-term financial plan period?
 - d. Has the portfolio holder reviewed historical trends in income data, and are they confident the income budgets are reflecting the full income potential within their portfolio whilst being realistic and achievable?
 - e. Is the Portfolio Holder satisfied with the Key Performance Indicators in place across his/her services? Any good examples to share?

Findings / Issues Raised

8. Portfolio Holders provided presentations and answers to all questions posed. The group welcomed the level of detail presented to them and subsequently reflected on key issues within each portfolio. This resulted in the following actions for Portfolio Holders and officers to resolve.
9. A common theme across some Portfolio Holders suggested inaccuracies in how officer time was apportioned to service cost centres. On the basis that true service costs, and ultimately full cost recovery (for some services) is extremely important, all Portfolio Holders are requested to undertake a review of cost allocations,

thereby ensuring accurate service cost capture, and that the recovery of costs is set at the appropriate level.

10. Members noted the recent changes to the external Emergency Planning support resulting in improved value for money. It was suggested therefore that due consideration be given to all NFDC outsourced services to ensure value for money is being achieved; and where not the case, that alternative options be explored (subject to contractual conditions).

Leaders Portfolio

11. The group acknowledged this Portfolio is cross cutting and were impressed by the Leader's understanding of their central role across all portfolios, particularly with the oversight of the Solent Freeport and Transformation programme. The group emphasised the importance of the significant investment in the Transformation programme and the expected savings that would follow.
12. Action to follow up:
 - The Portfolio Holder to ensure the MTFP reflects the current investment profile and realistic delivery of savings regarding Transformation.

Finance and Corporate Portfolio

13. Actions to follow up:
 - The Portfolio Holder to ensure the implementation of the new planning software is concluded in a timely manner and that the MTFP reflects the budget required.
 - The Portfolio Holder to ensure the Council is best placed to derive benefit from the Solent Freeport retained rates pool, when appropriate.
 - The Portfolio Holder to ensure there is full confidence in the forecast salary budgets considering the pay award implications and the direction of travel in terms of the national living wage.

Housing and Homelessness Portfolio

14. The group welcomed the Portfolio Holder taking forward a review of the mix of new building projects ensuring adequate temporary accommodation is provided to support a reduction in homelessness expenditure. It was also noted that the tenancy review initiative would now be coming into effect, and the group were keen to

ensure that this process was pro-actively followed through on a regular basis.

15. Actions to follow up:

- Given the Portfolio Holder stated they are unlikely to be achieved, the Portfolio Holder is asked to update the MTFP regarding the current savings expected associated with the homelessness budget, particularly in light of potential changes to grant funding and growing demand.
- The Portfolio Holder to explore the potential to repurpose our Garage sites given the decreasing trend in income.

Environment and Sustainability Portfolio

16. The group acknowledged this is a large portfolio with a lot of external influences including public behaviours affecting income streams and environmental risks particularly affecting our coastline. The significance of national Government policy specifically regarding the new waste arrangements was also flagged as a significant financial and service delivery risk.

17. Actions to follow up:

- The Portfolio Holder to bring forward a funding plan to support the significant costs associated with our Coastal strategy, including recognising the role and contributions required from external partners in addition to our own commitments as a first responder and minority landowner.
- The group welcomed the progression of a Parking Strategy but wanted to ensure the strategy gave a greater understanding regarding the approach to pricing.
- The group sought reassurance regarding the timely implementation of the Waste Strategy including comprehensive communications, and the Council's ability to recover the associated new burdens funding, particularly in light of the considerable risks associated with this project and unknown dependencies regarding third parties.

Planning and Economy Portfolio

18. Actions to follow up:

- The Portfolio Holder to ensure a review of the Planning and Building Control income is conducted given the pressures placed on the current income budget expectations. Consideration to be given as to

whether our charging structure is appropriate, and clarity as to whether are we recovering all chargeable elements.

- The Portfolio Holder to ensure all S106/CIL income is received and spent in a timely manner.
- The Portfolio Holder to ensure that costs within Planning were benchmarked with other local authorities, and that all resources linked to income were budgeted for accordingly.

Community & Safety Portfolio

19. Actions to follow up:

- The Portfolio Holder to review and consider options to improve the cost recovery status of the Appletree Careline service.
- To ensure the positive impact on the MTFP due to the transition from analogue to digital regarding the CCTV upgrades is delivered.

Corporate plan priorities

20. This report and its contents support all of the council's corporate plan priorities through the recommendations made regarding the budget setting process.

Financial and resource implications

21. The financial and resource implications from this report will filter through to future MTFP and budget setting reports, as required. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific finance and resource comments may need to be provided at that stage.

Legal implications

22. There are no direct legal implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific legal comments may need to be provided at that stage.

Risk assessment

23. There are no direct risk implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific risk comments may need to be provided at that stage.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

24. There are no direct environmental, climate or nature implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific environmental, climate or nature comments may need to be provided at that stage.

Equalities implications

25. There are no direct equalities implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific equalities comments may need to be provided at that stage.

Crime and disorder implications

26. There are no direct crime and disorder implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific crime and disorder comments may need to be provided at that stage.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

27. There are no direct data protection, information governance and ICT implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific data protection, information governance and ICT comments may need to be provided at that stage.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None

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Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 21 November 2024

COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2025/26, POLICY REVIEW AND COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS

Purpose	For review and recommendation
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The Council has a Council Tax Reduction scheme to support those on a low income with paying their council tax. The Council has discretion to set a local scheme for working age claimants, with pension age claims being administered in accordance with government regulations. The scheme is reviewed annually with proposed changes requiring Council agreement before coming into effect from 1 April.</p> <p>The Council has a Council Tax Support Scheme Prosecutions and Penalties policy for dealing with fraud and error. The policy has been reviewed as part of a cyclical review.</p> <p>The Council is introducing new council tax premiums from 1 April 2025 for long term empty properties and properties which are periodically occupied, commonly known as “second homes”. The report considers the Government prescribed exceptions to these premiums, with local authorities having discretion for their own local exceptions. The report proposes local exceptions as an extension of the prescribed exceptions.</p>
Recommendation	<p>That the Panel make a recommendation to Cabinet for the approval of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 1 April 2025: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) The removal of the 10% minimum contribution at an overall cost to precepting authorities of £297k

	<p>b) The removal of the Band D cap at an overall cost to precepting authorities of £33k</p> <p>c) The increase of the de-minimis rule to £2 at no net cost</p> <p>d) The alignment of childcare costs with Universal Credit for all claims at a saving of £3k to precepting authorities</p> <p>2. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme Sanctions and Prosecution Policy</p> <p>3. The local exceptions to the council tax premiums from 1 April 2025, as detailed in paragraph 42</p>
Reasons for recommendation	To approve changes to the Councils Council Tax Reduction scheme, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Sanctions and Penalties policy and exceptions to the empty home premium and second home premium.
Wards	All
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jeremy Heron – Finance & Corporate
Strategic Director	Alan Bethune – Strategic Director Corporate Resources and Transformation
Officer Contact	Ryan Stevens Service Manager Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services 02380 285693 Ryan.stevens@nfdc.gov.uk

Introduction and background

1. The purpose of this report is to consider the recommendations of the Council Tax Reduction Task and Finish Group on the Council Tax Reduction scheme 2025/26, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Sanctions and Penalties Policy, and local exceptions to the empty home premium and second home premium which are being introduced from 1 April 2025.

Council Tax Reduction scheme

2. Members will recall that local authorities are responsible for determining their own local Council Tax Reduction Scheme to support those of working age on low income with paying their council tax. The Government stipulated that there must be no change to the level of support that pensioners receive and there are no plans to localise the scheme for this group. There are no plans to include Council Tax Reduction within Universal Credit.
3. The Council must formally approve the Council Tax Reduction Scheme no later than 11 March in any year, to take effect from 1 April.
4. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme fulfils the prescribed requirements for localised schemes.
5. There are currently 7,868 claimants receiving Council Tax Reduction. Of these 4,213 are working age and 3,655 are of pensionable age. Appendix 1 provides caseload trend data.
6. The current Council Tax Reduction Scheme costs approximately £10 million, with this cost (foregone Council Tax) being shared between all precepting authorities.
7. The amount of Council Tax Reduction awarded affects the tax base of each organisation.

Review process

8. The Task & Finish Group met to review the current scheme and proposed changes effective from 1 April 2025.
9. The recommendations of the Task & Finish Group are to be considered by the Resources and Transformation Overview Scrutiny Panel, the Cabinet and full Council in December 2024.

The current local Council Tax Reduction scheme

10. The council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme protects vulnerable households so that some of the changes to the scheme do not apply to them. A person is vulnerable if they (or a partner) are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments or Severe Disablement Allowance.
11. The council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 requires all working age claimants (except vulnerable households) to pay a minimum of 10% council tax.

12. The council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme also includes:
- Council Tax Reductions are capped at band D (so that claimants living in higher banded properties receive support based on band D). There is no band cap for vulnerable households.
 - A savings limit of £6,000 (£16,000 for vulnerable households), so that claimants with more than £6,000 in savings are not entitled to any reduction.
 - The council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme incentivises work by disregarding £35.00 a week of earnings.

Matters considered by Task and Finish Group

13. Collecting council tax from those on low income is difficult, with significantly more work for officers. Administration has also increased, notably in working with those affected. In 2024/25 council tax bills increased by an average of 5%. This upward trend is likely to continue in the forthcoming years.
14. The Council Tax in-year collection rate for those in receipt of Council Tax Reduction, who are not a pensioner or vulnerable, is currently 77.6% (98.7% for non-Council Tax Reduction households) and during 2023/24 1,384 reminder notices were issued. There is administration and costs involved in collecting council tax, including dealing with customer queries, postage and making payment arrangements.
15. Many of the claimants have been affected by the increase in the cost of living, in particular fuel and food inflation which adversely affects low-income households. It is noted that there are some reports suggesting that Universal Credit rates are insufficient to meet day-to-day household expenditure. The Group also considered recent budget announcements including the increase of Universal Credit being 1.7% from April 2025 and the freezing of the Local Housing Allowance from 1 April 2025, meaning those receiving support may experience further financial challenges if household living costs increase beyond that level of Universal Credit increase. There are also changes to Universal Credit and the amounts that can be deducted from third parties, meaning the recovery of council tax arrears will become harder.
16. The Group also considered the additional income from the Council's introduction of the Second Homes Premium, which will result in a forecast overall net gain in excess of £2 million per annum in additional income between all precepting authorities.

Discussion on proposed changes for 2024/25

17. The group reviewed various aspects of the current scheme. This included:
 - a) the 10% minimum contribution
 - b) the Band D cap
 - c) the de-minimis rule
 - d) childcare costs

A. The 10% minimum contribution

18. The Group discussed the principle of claimants having to pay an amount towards their council tax, which has been part of the scheme since 2013. Currently, any award of Council Tax Reduction is based on 90% of the council tax liability (unless vulnerable, in which case it is based on 100% of the council tax liability), so there is a minimum contribution of at least 10% to pay. The proposal that was subject to consultation was to remove the 10% minimum contribution so that any award of Council Tax Reduction is based on 100% of the council tax liability.
19. The financial cost of this proposal is to increase the level of support (forego Council Tax) totalling approximately £297k per annum, affecting approximately 2,500 claimants, 1,000 of which currently receive the maximum level of support of 90% due to their income level.
20. From the consultation 59% strongly agreed or agreed with this proposal with 19% neither agreeing or disagreeing. The Group also considered the response from Hampshire County Council. Their response recognised that local authorities need to set schemes to support local needs, but due to their severe cost pressures of providing adult social care and children's social care they expressed "concerns about making schemes more generous if that would have a significant impact on income".
21. The Group discussed the consultation responses, and although sympathetic to Hampshire County Councils financial situation, on reflection considered that the scheme should be supporting our most vulnerable households; a key corporate plan objective.
22. **The Group did recognise the additional financial cost, but by majority recommend removing the 10% minimum contribution.**

B. Removal of the Band D cap

23. The Group discussed the principle of capping any Council Tax Reduction to a Band D. This proposal that was subject to consultation affects 100 claims and consideration was given to the collection rates amongst this cohort and the impact where households are placed into properties of Band E and above or require larger property due to household size.
24. The financial cost of this proposal is to increase the level of support by approximately £33k per annum, affecting approximately 40 claimants.
25. From the consultation 53% strongly agreed or agreed with this proposal with 21% neither agreeing or disagreeing. The Group also considered the response from Hampshire County Council, which as above, expressed concerns about any changes that would make the scheme more generous and therefore impacting on their income. The Group discussed this response, and although sympathetic to Hampshire County Councils financial situation, on reflection considered that the scheme should be supporting our most vulnerable households; a key corporate plan objective.
26. **The Group did recognise the additional financial cost, but recommend removing the band D cap.**

C. The de-minimis rule

27. The proposed change that was subject to consultation was to increase the current de-minimis amount from £1 to £2, whereby any reduction in entitlement by up to £2 will not affect entitlement, which will remain at the existing level. This is to reduce administration, multiple bills being produced and reduce paper and costs.
28. From the consultation 73% strongly agreed or agreed with this proposal with 19% neither agreeing or disagreeing. The Group also considered the response from Hampshire County Council, who were supportive of this change to reduce administration and improve the scheme.
29. The financial cost of this proposal is to increase the level of support by £3k per annum, but there will be savings in terms of administration, paper and postage.
30. **The Group recommend increasing the de-minimis amount from £1 to £2.**

D. Child care costs

31. The proposed change that was subject to consultation was to align the treatment of child care costs with Universal Credit for all claims. Currently, those in continuous receipt of Council Tax Reduction from 31 March 2013 have a higher weekly disregard of child care from earnings in the assessment of entitlement, requiring monthly manual intervention. This change enables full automation and reduces administration.
32. From the consultation 66% strongly agreed or agreed with this proposal with 24% neither agreeing or disagreeing. The Group also considered the response from Hampshire County Council, who were supportive of this change to reduce administration and improve the scheme.
33. The financial cost of this proposal is to reduce the level of support by £3k, which will affect approximately 42 claimants, although as claims migrate to Universal Credit some will actually be better off, and the availability of the Exceptional Hardship Payment scheme to support those affected whereby any reduction in entitlement causes exceptional financial hardship.
34. **The Group recommend aligning child care costs with Universal Credit for all claims.**

Consultation

35. The Council has a duty to consult on any changes to the scheme. The Council actively undertook a consultation exercise over a 6-week period, from 21 August 2024 to 4 October 2024, advertising on the council's website, social media, residents' email, as well as by telephone, and contacted Hampshire County Council and Citizens Advice New Forest.
36. The Council received 225 responses. The Group considered the responses in their discussions before finalising their recommendations, as included within this report.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme Sanctions and Prosecutions policy

37. The Group reviewed the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme Sanctions and Penalties policy, which provides details on dealing with fraud and error within the Council Tax Reduction scheme. Minor amendments were proposed, as there have been no changes to legislation, see Appendix 2.

38. **The Group support the updated policy and recommend its approval and adoption with immediate effect.**

Council Tax premiums

39. The Council has approved two premiums from 1 April 2025, these being:

- reducing the length of time a 100% premium can apply for long term empty properties from 2 years to 1 year
- a 100% premium for properties which are furnished and periodically occupied, commonly referred to as “second homes”

40. Government have very recently provided legislation and accompanying guidance that stipulate specific exceptions where a premium cannot apply, some of which are time limited, whilst other exceptions are not, such as annexes that form part of a main dwelling, properties where year round occupation is restricted, or those living elsewhere in armed forces accommodation. The guidance and legislation allow local authorities to apply local discretion to their own schemes, should they so wish.

41. The Group considered three of the exceptions and whether to apply a local discretion, these being:

Class	Definition	Prescribed term
G	Dwellings being actively marketed for sale	12 months
H	Dwellings being actively marketed for let	12 months
M	Empty properties requiring or undergoing major repairs or structural alterations	12 months

42. Having considered the prescribed exceptions as above, the Group recommend the Council consider making the following discretionary exceptions in addition to the governments suggested prescribed exceptions, as follows:

Class	Local discretion	Reason
G	To extend the period by up to 6 months	In exceptional circumstances where there are mitigating factors clearly evidenced

H	None	The New Forest has a buoyant rental market so 12 months is a reasonable time period for a property to be let and not extending will incentivise owners to let their property
M	To extend the period by up to an initial period of 6 months, where mitigating circumstances can be evidenced, and a further period of up to 6 months in exceptional circumstances	It is recognised that there can be delays or mitigating factors that may extend the time taken to complete building works to enable a property to become habitable

43. The Group discussed any other categories of property where a local exception could apply and that these could be considered and approved through a Portfolio Holder Decision where appropriate.
44. The local exceptions, subject to Cabinet and Council approval, would be effective from 1 April 2025 when the new premiums apply. Taxpayers, based on current known information, will be notified by letter of the forthcoming changes and to contact us should their circumstances change, or if an exception should be applied from 1 April 2025.

Corporate plan priorities

45. The contents of this report support our key priorities of our Corporate Plan by supporting low-income households and encouraging properties to be brought back into use.

Options appraisal

46. Details of the options and discussions are included in the paragraphs above.

Financial and resource implications

47. The proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme were discussed with the Group, with the additional total support amounting to circa £327k per annum, equating to approximately £32k to the Council, although there would be savings in administration, such as officer time and postage to be considered. The summarised costings are:

Option A – Additional cost of £297k

Option B – Additional cost of £33k

Option C – Cost neutral

Option D – Reduction in cost of £3k

48. The Group discussed the increase in cost but in conjunction with the additional income to be received from the introduction of the new council tax premiums from 1 April 2025, and the reduction in administration. The Group considered this a positive overall outcome whereby support for low income households has increased, offset through additional income from the introduction of new premiums to the precepting authorities.
49. The changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme will reduce administration, which can be utilised elsewhere, including the administration of the new council tax premiums.

Legal implications

50. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 provided for the introduction of the localisation of Council Tax support by making changes to the Local Government Finance Act 1992. These require that:
- For each financial year, each billing authority must consider whether to revise its scheme or replace it with another scheme
51. In accordance with legislation, the Council has already made a determination at least one year prior to the financial year to which the premiums will apply. The Council must apply the legislated exceptions to the premiums where conditions are met.

Risk assessment

52. There are no risk assessments required.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

53. There are no significant environmental or climate and nature implications arising from this report, although the recommendations will reduce the use of paper as fewer notices and bills will be issued.

Equalities implications

54. Our Council Tax Reduction scheme continues to support those on a low income and protects vulnerable households and proactive steps are taken to promote and maximise take-up, as well as to provide additional advice and support where appropriate. The proposed

changes to the scheme will provide additional support to those on a low income.

Crime and disorder implications

55. There are no crime and disorder implications arising directly from this report.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

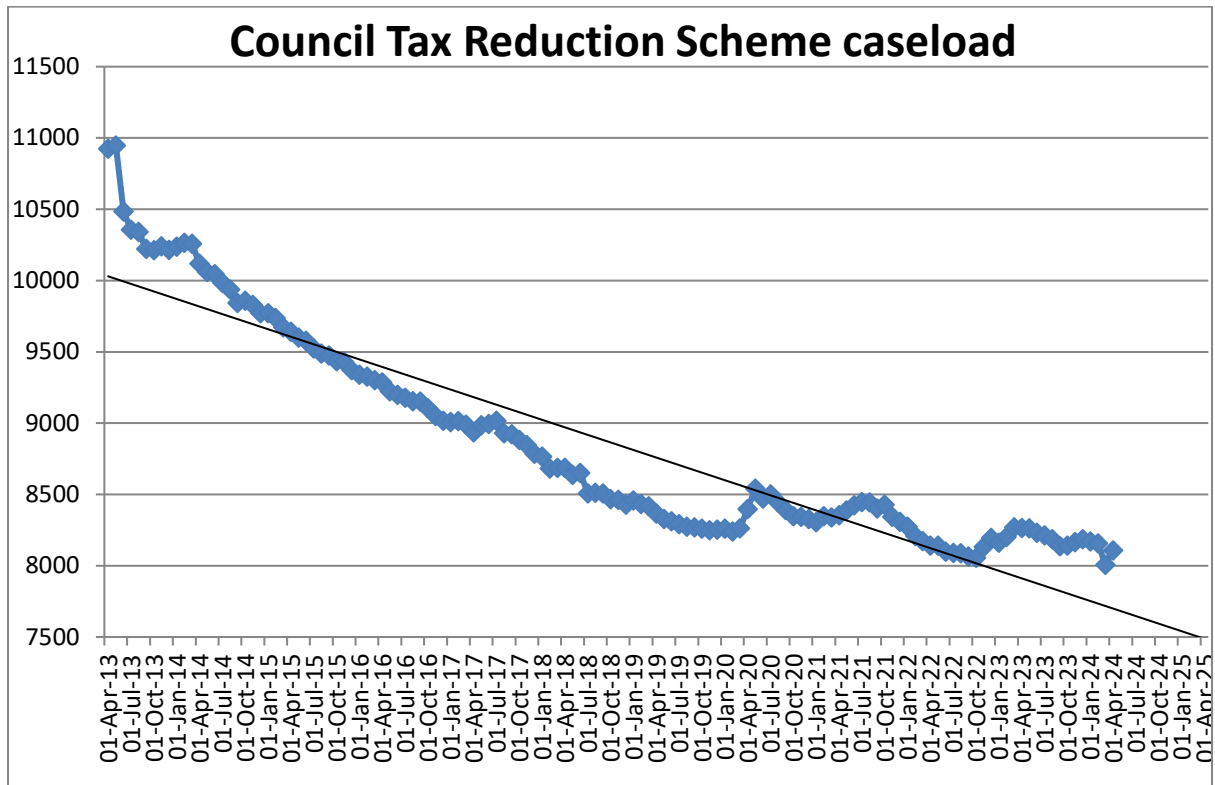
56. There are no data protection, information governance or ICT implications arising from this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Caseload trends
Appendix 2 – The Council Tax
Reduction Scheme Sanctions and
Penalties Policy

Background Papers:

Appendix 1 – Caseload Trends





Council Tax Reduction Scheme Prosecutions and Penalties Policy

Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services

November 2024

1. Introduction

1.1 New Forest District Council (“The Council”) is responsible for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and therefore, has a duty to prevent and detect fraudulent claims as part of its commitment to protecting public funds. The Councils Fraud Policy makes it clear that fraud in any form will not be tolerated and the Council is committed to applying the most appropriate sanctions to those it believes have obtained Council Tax Reduction fraudulently.

2. Aims

2.1 The aim of the policy is to:

- provide proportionate but robust sanctions to deal with those suspected of fraud.
- deter those in receipt of Council Tax Reduction from committing fraud
- deter those who have committed fraud from re-offending
- underpin good governance in accordance with the Councils Fraud Policy

3. Legislation

3.1 This policy has regard to the following legislation:

- The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Detection of Fraud and Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013

3.2 There are two main offences under this legislation:

- False representation and
- Failure to notify a change of circumstances

3.4 False Representation

3.5 Regulation 7 creates an offence where a person makes a statement or representation which he or she knows to be false for the purpose of obtaining a reduction under a Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

3.6 It is also an offence for a person to provide or knowingly cause or allow to be provided a document or information which that person knows to be false in a material particular.

3.7 Failure to notify a change in circumstances

3.8 Regulation 8 creates an offence where there has been a change of circumstances which a person knows affects their entitlement to a reduction, and the person fails to give notice of the change as required by the authority’s scheme.

3.9 Regulation 11 of the Council Tax Reduction schemes (Detection of Fraud and Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013, enables an authority to invite a person

to agree to pay a penalty as an alternative to prosecution for an offence relating to the award of a reduction under a Council Tax Reduction Scheme which a person was not entitled to, or an offence relating to an act or omission which could have resulted in such an award.

3.10 Regulations 12 and 13 of the Council Tax Reduction schemes (Detection of Fraud and Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013, enable a billing authority to impose a penalty of £70 on a person in circumstances such as where a person negligently:

- Makes an incorrect statement in connection with an application for a reduction under a council tax reduction scheme or
- Where a person fails to notify a change of circumstances when required to do so under a scheme.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 All staff within the Revenues and Benefits Service have a responsibility to ensure accuracy of awards, procedures are followed and referrals made to the Corporate Fraud and Compliance Officer where appropriate. Managers are responsible for maintaining procedures and controls and compliance.

5. Investigation for suspected fraud

5.1 If the council suspects a person of giving them wrong or misleading information, they may be investigated to establish if any fraud offences have occurred. The council could ask them to attend an interview known as an Interview Under Caution if we suspect an offence may have occurred. The council will give at least 5 days' notice for the interview and the person affected may bring someone to accompany them which could include a legal representative. The Council will decide who can attend the interview.

5.2 Following the Interview under caution a decision will be made as to the next steps, which could include prosecution, an Administration Penalty or a £70 penalty as detailed below. Each case will be looked at on an individual basis.

5.3 Legal proceedings can start at any time within the period of twelve months from the alleged commission of the offence.

6. Council Tax Reduction (CTR) – Penalties and Prosecution

6.1 All sanction decisions will be consistent, balanced and fair and relate to the degree and nature of the offence. The Council will decide the degree or type of sanction to be used in each individual case. In coming to any decision many factors will be taken into account including the seriousness of the offence, the value of the overpayment, the length of the fraud, the vulnerability of the claimant, and the health and age of the claimant.

6.2 Written warnings

6.2.1. A written warning may be issued where there has been an offence and to warn about future behaviour so as to act as a deterrent. A written warning may be issued where:

- The person has not previously been investigated for a Council Tax Reduction scheme offence
- The amount of any Council Tax Reduction where there is no entitlement is less than £1,000

6.2.2 The Council will take into consideration the following factors when deciding if a written warning is appropriate:

- The persons wilfulness in committing the offence
- The persons attitude, for example if regret is expressed for their actions
- Any other mitigating factor

6.3. Administrative Penalties

6.3.1 If the Council is satisfied that an offence has occurred we may ask the person to pay a penalty instead of prosecuting them. If the penalty is paid, they will not be prosecuted for that offence. Any penalty paid will be in addition to repaying any Council Tax Reduction they were not entitled to.

6.3.2 The penalty will be 50% of the Council Tax Reduction awarded which the claimant was not entitled to, with a minimum payment of £100 and a maximum payment of £1,000. If a person did not actually get any Council Tax Reduction, for example the person made a false claim, the penalty will be £100.

6.3.3 An Administrative Penalty is appropriate when:

- The Department for Work and Pensions have administered an Administrative Penalty for Housing Benefit which the claimant has accepted.
- The case is suitable for prosecution and satisfies the council's prosecution procedures:
- The case is not so serious that the first option should be prosecution;
- The excess payment of Council Tax Reduction that the person was not entitled to is less than £3,000.00
- The customer has not received a sanction for a Council Tax reduction offence in previous 5 years (the scheme started in April 2013)

6.3.4 There is no requirement for the person to admit the offence before an Administrative Penalty can be offered.

6.3.5 An Administrative Penalty is not appropriate when:

- The person has been convicted of Council Tax Reduction fraud in past 5 years (the scheme started in April 2013)

- The person has accepted an Administrative Penalty in the previous 5 years
 - the fraud continued over a long period;
 - the fraud was calculated and deliberate, for example the person planned it from the outset by making a false statement on a new or repeat claim form. In these cases, the full circumstances of the case will be considered to enable a balanced judgement to be made to decide whether an Administrative Penalty or prosecution of the person is appropriate.
- 6.3.6 A person will be requested to attend an interview if the Council believes an offence may have occurred. The interview will be conducted by an authorised officer from the council. The council will give at least 5 days' notice for the interview and the person affected may bring someone to accompany them which could include a legal representative
- 6.3.7 Where a person does not attend an interview and does not contact the office within 5 working days to provide an explanation and arrange a further appointment, a final appointment will be arranged with them. If the person fails to attend this appointment, the Council will consider the case for prosecution.
- 6.3.8 If the person accepts an Administrative Penalty the council will notify the person in writing. In accordance with legislation, the person has 14 days, known as the *cooling off period*, to decline the Administrative Penalty. Where the person accepts the Administrative Penalty they are required to sign and return the *agreement form*. Where a person withdraws their agreement, which must be received in writing, the case will be submitted for prosecution. If after 14 days, the person has made no contact with the council, the Administrative Penalty will be deemed as accepted.
- 6.3.9 If a person declines to accept the Administrative Penalty, the case will be considered for prosecution. The court will be informed that the person refused to accept an Administrative Penalty.

6.4 Paying the Administrative Penalty

- 6.4.1 An invoice will be issued for the recovery of the Administrative Penalty and a payment plan can be arranged for the payment of the invoice. When agreeing the payment plan the council will consider affordability. Where the penalty is not paid, the Sundry Income Team will recover the debt by any means available to them, this may include using Collection Agents or court
- 6.4.2 If, after imposing an Administrative Penalty, the council revises the amount of Council Tax Reduction that the person is not entitled to, the council will revise the Administrative Penalty. Where the amount is lower, the person will be repaid any excess sums paid. Where the Administrative Penalty is to be paid in instalments, this should ensure that full payment is to be paid no later than one month before the end of the period to issue a prosecution, so that consideration should be given to whether a prosecution should be issued if the payments are not made.

6.5 Prosecution

- 6.5.1 Prosecution is the ultimate sanction available to the Council and will be considered. The matter will be referred to Legal Services to determine whether prosecution is in the public interest, whether the claimant is fit to be prosecuted and whether the evidence has passed the evidential sufficiency test i.e. the Council must be satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to provide a 'realistic prospect of conviction' against every defendant on every charge and has been obtained in an appropriate manner.

7. Giving false information to get Council Tax Reduction

- 7.1 The council may prosecute a person if they give wrong information when they apply for Council Tax Reduction.
- 7.2 The council may prosecute if the person claiming deliberately gave wrong information when they applied for Council Tax Reduction. The council might also prosecute a person if they encouraged a claimant to give wrong information on their behalf. For example, a partner, member of the household or someone who assisted in completing a document might be prosecuted if they told the council that they were not working or had no savings when they knew this to be false.

8. Failure to notify a change in your circumstances

- 8.1 If someone is already getting Council Tax Reduction, they might be prosecuted if they do not notify the council about any change in their circumstances which they know affects their entitlement to Council Tax Reduction or the amount they receive. For example, the person should notify the council if they start a job or if a partner comes to live with them. They need to do this promptly. This means notifying the council within 21 days of the date of change, or as soon as possible if unable to notify within 21 days.
- 8.2 A person can also be prosecuted if they deliberately encourage or allow someone else not to notify changes affecting their Council Tax Reduction entitlement.
- 8.3 Paying a penalty for giving wrong information or for not notifying the council about a change in circumstances**
- 8.4 The council will not always prosecute when a person gives wrong information or fails to notify a change in circumstances. Instead, they may ask the customer to pay a £70.00 penalty. The council may ask a person to do this if they negligently make an incorrect statement in connection with an application or because a person did not notify the Council about a change in their circumstances which they should have known would affect their Council Tax Reduction award.
- 8.5 The council will not ask for the £70.00 penalty to be paid if a person is being prosecuted or if they are being asked to pay an Administrative Penalty as an alternative to being prosecuted.

- 8.6 A person may not have to pay a penalty if they have taken reasonable steps to correct their mistake. Taking reasonable steps might include contacting the council as soon as they realise they had made a mistake.
- 8.7 The £70.00 penalty is in addition to repaying any Council Tax Reduction the customer should not have received.
- 8.8 There is no appeal right of appeal against the penalty. However, if a person successfully appeals a decision about their Council Tax Reduction, which reduces the overpayment to zero, the council may withdraw the penalty.
- 8.9 An invoice will be issued for the recovery of the Penalty and a payment plan can be arranged for the payment of the invoice. Where the penalty is not paid, the Income Recovery Team will recover the debt by any means available to them.

9. Joint working with the Department for Work and Pensions

- 9.1 Joint working is a collaborative approach to fraud investigations, including information and intelligence sharing and two-way communication leading to a joint interview under caution, a single prosecution file preparation, a single prosecution or other outcome. The Council will proactively work with the Department for Work and Pensions to investigate where fraud has allegedly been committed and where evidence is sufficient to warrant further prosecutions.

10. Communicating the policy

- 10.1 The council will publish this policy on the website and refer to it on decision notices to all recipients of a Council Tax Reduction and on application forms.
- 10.2 Staff will undertake annual fraud awareness training and fraud awareness will be continually promoted.

11. Performance Monitoring

- 11.1 The council will monitor:
- the number and type of penalty
 - payments received
 - the number of appeals and the outcome
- 11.2 The council will use this information to review procedures and policy where appropriate.

12. Policy Review

- 12.1 The council will review this policy every three years or earlier if there is new legislation.

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Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel

November 2024





Future New Forest

Transforming tomorrow, together

Resources and Transformation O&S Panel
21 November 2024

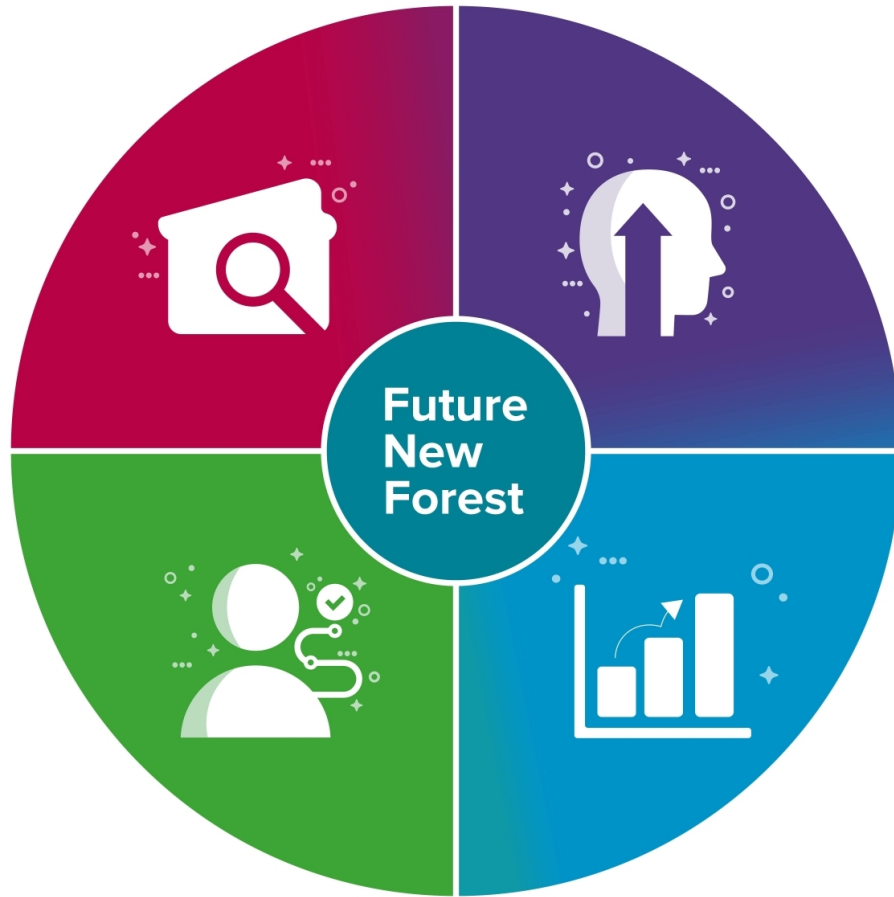


Update

1. Mobilisation
2. Progress update
 - a) Customer & digital
 - b) People & capabilities
 - c) Assets & accommodation
 - d) Finance & delivery
3. Next steps



Mobilisation



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- Transformation Team are all in post, allocated and deployed to their services.
- Knowledge transfer from ignite completed.
- First phase of deliverables identified.
- Governance for the Transformation programme has been set up and put in place and projects boards being established.
- Detailed programme structure and project planning underway.





Progress update

- Digital Strategy Principles ready for review by this group.
- Transformation & Improvement Specialists working alongside customer teams to identify key areas for improvement.
- All digital projects have been initiated with ICT and Transformation Team working in collaboration.
- Core requirements gathering has started for CRM and process optimisation being planned.
- Regulatory Services project reset and linked to wider transformation.

What difference will this make:

- Customers will find it easier to access services and get what they need right first time
- Customers who need more support to access services will receive that support
- Customer Teams will have the digital tools they need to provide an excellent service





Progress update

- Initial discovery work and data gathering for the People Strategy is complete
- Staff survey completed and organisational findings shared- service level detail to follow.
- Next tier of management development commenced September 2024 (60 people)- Leadership buddy groups working on plans to support this cohort.
- Change Champion network engaged, learning needs assessed and training planned for November.

What difference will this make:

- We will understand the values, behaviours and skills our people need to deliver for our residents
- Our people will continue to think NFDC is a great place to work
- NFDC will be considered an 'employer of choice'





Progress update

- MACE asset review complete and final report received.
- Associated Strategic Asset Management Framework being created and due for agreement at March 25 Cabinet.
- Recommendation to improve asset management technology being considered in light of potential to align asset systems.
- ATC accommodation paper being considered by EMT- detailing approach to the accommodation project, including plans for staff consultation and engagement.

What difference will this make:

- Our Asset and Transformation strategies will be aligned so opportunities for co-design are maximised
- Our space is used in the right way and supports our people to deliver





Progress update

- Benchmarking report on fees and charges completed and will inform ongoing priorities for strategic service reviews.
- Benefits realisation tracker is being developed and approach to measures discussed with corporate finance .
- Working with customer teams to review the quick wins for Council Tax processes and prioritise areas of improvement.

What difference will this make:

- We will be clear on our progress towards our transformation objectives
- Our processes will be reviewed to ensure we deliver improvement at pace where appropriate, and link to transformation where solutions are more complex



Next Steps

Continue:

- Delivering significant transformation projects
- Identifying areas for rapid improvement
- Risks/Dependencies
- Building out the Plan
- Set up reporting

Start:

- Benefits Approach
- Comms and Engagement Plan (due for testing)
- Resource Mapping
- Budget milestones





Thank you for your time



Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel

November 2024

Digital Strategy 2025-2028

The 7 Digital Principles

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Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel

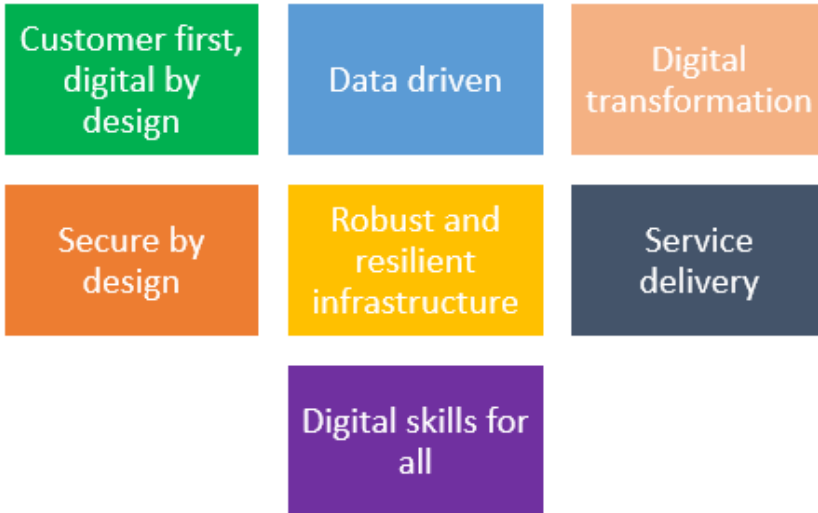
1. Overview of the 7 Digital Principles
2. Feedback and questions



The 7 Digital Principles



The 7 Digital Principles



Our Digital Vision:

“to be a digital council that embraces the opportunities of technology and modern digital service design to empower our staff with best in class digital tools to efficiently deliver an effective ‘customer first’ experience for its residents”

Principle 1 – Customer first, digital by design



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Customer first,
digital by
design

Customer needs will be at the heart of the digital services that we design and deliver.

Through a ‘customer first, digital by design’ approach the council can offer services that are accessible twenty-four hours a day, allowing our customers to apply for, pay for, view and report at times that are convenient to them.

Principle 2 – Data driven



Data driven

All services will proactively use data to inform decision making and report performance.

Through a council wide Data Strategy and adoption of Master Data Management (MDM) principles, data can be extracted, cleansed, stored and made available to those who need it and are permitted to access it.

‘Golden records’ of our customers and assets will provide a single source of the truth leading to better understanding and informed decision making.

With accurate data, council staff will be able to see a ‘360 view’ of our customers and assets providing an integrated and consistent customer experience and a better understanding of customer needs.

Principle 3 – Digital transformation



Digital transformation

Digital Transformation will introduce positive change through the design of modern and innovative digital services.

Digital Transformation (DT) will create new or modify existing business processes, culture, and deliver exceptional customer experiences.

The ICT work programme will deliver digital change through various projects that support our wider Transformation programme and put our customers at the forefront of service design.

Principle 4 – Secure by design



Secure by
design

Digital services will be secure by design to protect the council's data, systems and people.

All digital services that we offer will be secure by design. This prioritises security from the outset of product design and throughout its lifecycle.

The council will need to take a holistic approach to cyber security prioritising it as a core business requirement rather than a technical feature.

Principle 5 – Robust and resilient infrastructure



Robust and
resilient
infrastructure

Digital services will be underpinned by robust and resilient infrastructure

Delivery of all services is increasingly reliant on ICT systems and connectivity therefore it is essential that the underpinning infrastructure is robust and resilient but also flexible and agile to meet changing business requirements, technology advancements and the ever-changing landscape of cyber security threats.

Principle 6 – Service delivery



Service
delivery

Our ICT team will manage the end-to-end operations of our digital services through best practice IT Service Management (ITSM)

The ICT service exists to support the council deliver its services using modern, robust and secure digital technologies.

Principle 7 – Digital skills for all



Digital skills for
all

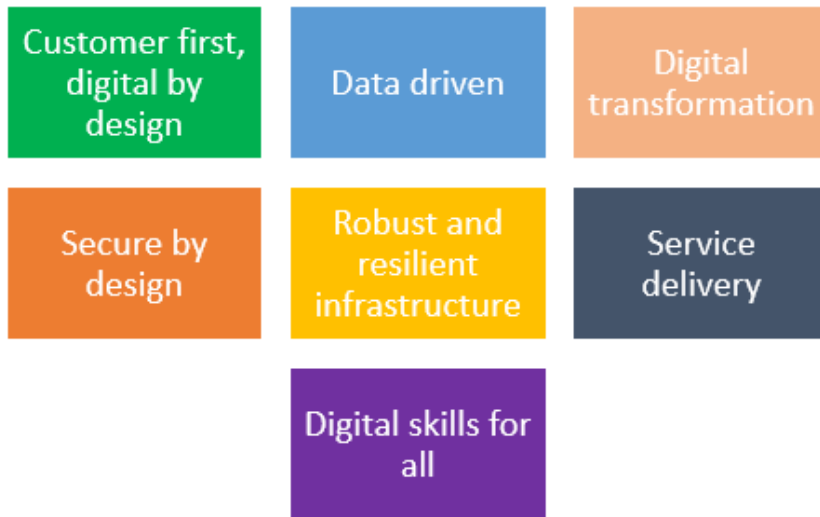
Staff will be supported through learning and development in digital skills to safely benefit from and contribute to the councils' digital services

We must be mindful that our staff have varying levels of digital skills so investment in skills development, training and career progression opportunities will help ensure an appropriately skilled, resilient and positive wellbeing workforce.

Summary



The 7 Digital Principles



- The panel have been presented with a summary of the 7 Digital Principles.
- Consultation has been undertaken with the Senior Leadership Team who were supportive.
- Benchmarking has been undertaken against fellow councils and industry best practice.
- The full Digital Strategy will be brought back to panel in early 2025.



Recommendations

- The Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel are asked to note the contents of this update and to support the 7 Digital Principles.
- Feedback and questions are welcomed by all panel members.

Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel

November 2024

RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME – 2024/25			
23 JANUARY 2025			
Asset Maintenance and Replacement Programme	To receive details of the proposed programme and pass any comments to Cabinet.	Written Report	Alan Bethune / Paul Whittles
Capital Strategy	To receive details of the proposed strategy and pass any comments to Cabinet.	Written Report	Alan Bethune / Paul Whittles
Transformation Programme Update	To receive an update on progress with the Transformation programme.	Written Report / Presentation	Rebecca Drummond / Ingrid Archer
Transformation Programme / Digital Strategy	To receive details of the Digital Strategy	Written Report	Rish Bird / Kim Gray
Transformation Programme / Update on Asset Review	To receive an update on the Asset Review	Written Report	Rebecca Drummond / Alan Bethune
Performance Dashboards	To receive portfolio performance data	Written Report	Saqib Yasin
Platinum Jubilee Business Park	To receive an update	Presentation	Alan Bethune

20 MARCH 2025			
ICT Strategy Delivery Update	To receive the Annual Update on progress with delivery of the ICT strategy	Presentation	Rich Bird / Kim Gray
Transformation Programme Update	To receive an update on progress with the Transformation programme.	Written Report	Rebecca Drummond / Ingrid Archer

Peer Review Update	To receive details of the recent Peer Review and related action plan	Written Report	Rebecca Drummond
25 JUNE 2025			
Commercial and Residential Property Strategies	To receive a presentation on the performance to date in the delivery of the Commercial and Residential Property strategies.	Presentation	Alan Bethune / Andrew Mills
Transformation Programme Update	To receive an update on progress with the Transformation programme.	Written Report	Rebecca Drummond / Ingrid Archer
Council Tax T&F Group Arrangements for 2025	To agree the arrangements for the 2025 process	Agenda item	Ryan Stevens / Andy Rogers
Financial Strategy T&F Arrangements for 2025	To agree the arrangements for the 2025 process	Agenda item	Ryan Stevens / Andy Rogers
Annual Performance and Budget Outturn Report	To receive the Annual Performance and Budget Outturn Report	Written Report	Paul Whittles / Saqib Yasin