

# **Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**19 June 2025**

## **Compliment and Complaints Report, Business Support Department 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025**

Report from: Phil Watts, Chief Operating Officer  
Author: Paul Boyd, Chief Information Officer  
Michele Pink, Customer Relations Manager

### Summary

This report provides compliment and complaint performance for the Business Support Department for 2024-25 and compares this to the previous year. The report also provides insight into the review and service redesign of the Stage 2 Complaints Process and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, referring to the council's new Feedback Policy.

This report notably highlights:

- High volumes of compliments for services provided by the Business Support Department
- The imminent launch of Medway Council's Feedback Policy
- Transformation update for corporate Stage 2 complaints

### 1. Recommendation

1.1. The Committee is requested to note this report, which was requested at the Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny committee meeting on 30 January 2025.

### 2. Budget and policy framework

2.1. The local government act 1974, and supporting guidance from the local government and social care ombudsman (LGSCO), sets out the requirement for local authorities to have mechanisms in place to handle complaints.

2.2. The local government and social care ombudsman's complaint handling code commands a two-stage complaint procedure, with an emphasis on accessibility, timeliness, and fairness.

- 2.3. Complainants can refer their complaints to the local government and social care ombudsman for an independent and impartial review after both stages of the council's complaints procedure have been exhausted.
- 2.4. The ombudsman expects local authorities to have a single policy for handling complaints and provide guidance on what a good complaints procedure should look like.
- 2.5. Local authorities must complete an annual self-assessment evidencing compliance with the complaint handling code.

### 3. Background

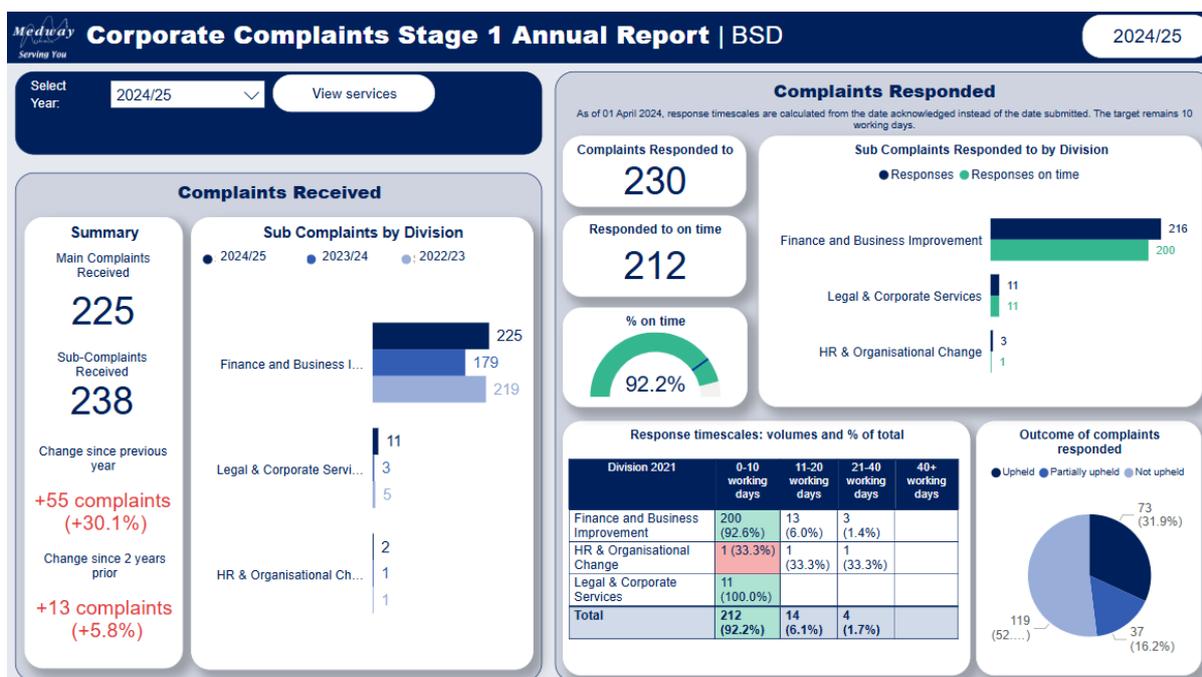
- 3.1. Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny asked for an annual report on compliments and complaints within the Business Support Department (BSD) and an update on the work being carried out on the redesign of the Stage 2 complaints process at the meeting on 30 January 2025.
- 3.2. The Customer Relations Team oversees the process of managing compliments, comments and complaints received by residents of, or visitor to, Medway.
- 3.3. Medway Council's complaint procedure aims to establish whether there has been fault on the Council's part, rectify mistakes by applying appropriate and proportionate remedies in line with Ombudsman guidance, and to learn from customer feedback.
- 3.4. The Customer Relations Team gathers compliment and complaint performance data and themes, and shares this with services to support learning and to drive improvements across the authority.

### 4. Compliments

- 4.1. Medway council received a total of 588 compliments about its corporate services, an increase of 12% compared to the previous year.
- 4.2. Almost half of these (296) were for services provided by the Business Support Department, meaning that it received **more compliments than complaints in 2024/25**.

Summary of compliments about services provided by BSD		
Volume	Service	Theme of compliments
191	Benefits	Friendly and helpful staff, and appreciation for financial support and of the services offered by McMillan Welfare Benefit Team
90	CABS	Friendly and supportive staff, good customer service, and appreciation for the Community Interpreting Service.
7	Revenues	Appreciation for staff who listened to customers and gave helpful advice.
5	Whole council	Happy where money is being spent despite problems with funding.
2	Elections and Member services	Helpful staff throughout the election process and assisting a member of the public following a fall.
1	Recovery	Officers went above and beyond to help
296	TOTAL	

## 5. Stage 1 corporate complaints for the Business Support Department

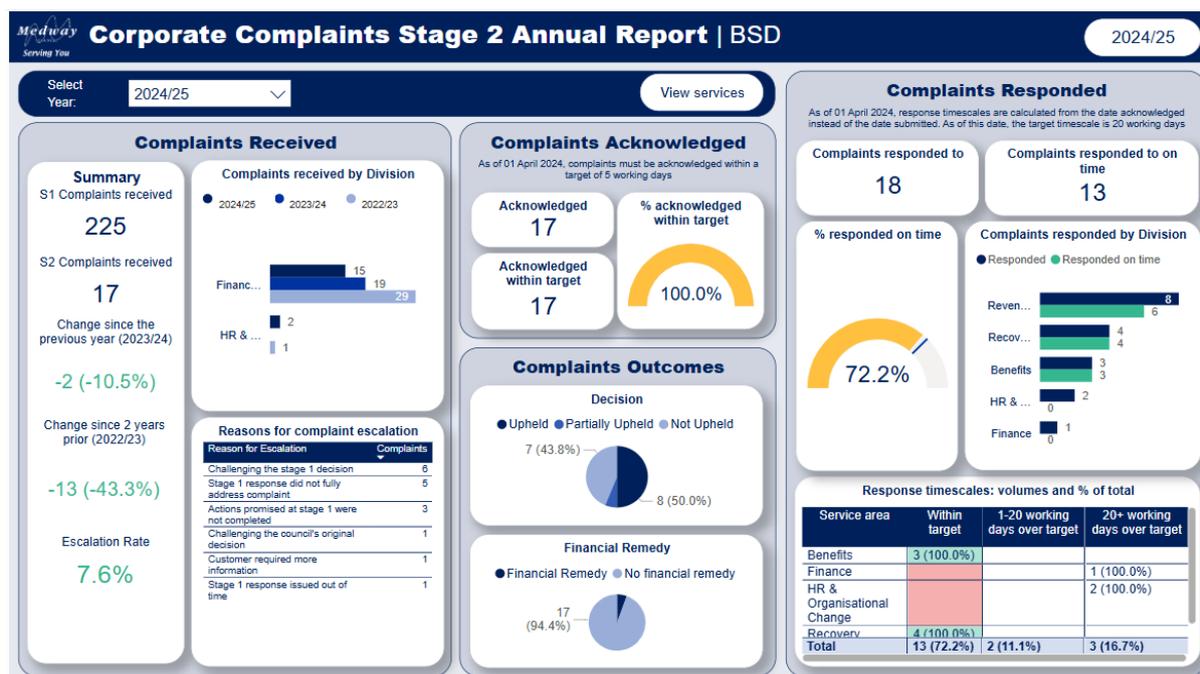


5.1. Volumes of Stage 1 corporate complaints for the Business and Support Department increased by around 25% compared to the previous year.

5.2. Increases were mostly experienced in the Revenue and Benefits teams, and mainly related to delays in completing assessments, dissatisfaction with decisions around assessments, discounts and exemptions, and difficulties with payments.

5.3. Performance in responding to Stage 1 complaints improved, with 92.2% of complaints responded to within 10 working days, exceeding the council's target of 80%.

## 6. Stage 2 Corporate Complaints for the Business Support Department



- 6.1. A total of 17 complaints were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 for the Business Support Department, a reduction of 10.5% on the previous year.
- 6.2. The Stage 2 escalation data is a particularly rich source of learning for the organisation. Within BSD, 35% (6/17) of escalations were due to residents challenging the stage 1 decision, which is the complainant's prerogative and something we actively encourage.
- 6.3. However, 29% (5/17) of escalations were due to services not fully addressing the original complaint, and 18% (3/17) of escalations were because of the actions promised at Stage 1 were not completed.
- 6.4. The efficiencies identified from the service redesign of the Stage 2 complaints process (see section 10) will enable the Customer Relations Team to spend more time utilising their skills and expertise in supporting services to improve their handling of Stage 1 complaints, which will not only improve the Council's performance, but will also achieve efficiencies by reducing the number of escalations from Stage 1 by ensuring all aspects of the original complaint are addressed and promised actions are taken.

## 7. Ombudsman referrals and decisions

- 7.1. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman notified Medway Council that it had made decisions on 72 cases; seven of these were for the Business Support Department and all seven were closed by the Ombudsman after it made its initial enquiries:
  - Five were closed and no further action was requested
  - One was closed as it was outside of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction
  - One was closed as it was premature, and it was referred back to Medway Council to investigate under its two-stage complaint procedure.

## 8. Equality

- 8.1. The Council is committed to achieving equality of opportunity, access, and outcomes for all, through the delivery and commissioning of high-quality services that are accessible and fair, and mainstreaming equity and diversity across all service delivery activities.
- 8.2. Medway Council anticipates equality needs and ensures that the compliments, comments, and complaints procedure is accessible.
- 8.3. Customers are also invited to tell the council about their disability and how we can support them through the process when they make a complaint, for example, by providing responses in alternative formats such as braille or large print, or by organising a BSL interpreter for residents.

## 9. Learning from complaints

- 9.1. The Complaint Handlers Group meets quarterly to review compliment and complaint data, discuss service failures and improvements, review Ombudsman guidance and focus reports, and to share best practice.
- 9.2. The Customer Relations Team meet with complaint handlers and Heads of Services following all upheld decisions made by the Ombudsman, to ensure that the learning from both the Ombudsman's investigation, and the experience gained from handling the complaint are used effectively to improve knowledge, skills and processes.

## 10. Complaint Handling Code and Feedback Policy

- 10.1. In February 2024, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman released its new Complaint Handling Code under its powers to provide "guidance about good administrative practice" under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974, aligning its principles with the Housing Ombudsman Service code.
- 10.2. Councils were expected to implement the Code as soon as possible, although the Ombudsman will not consider the Code in its casework until 1 April 2026, allowing council's good time to make the necessary changes to apply the Code.
- 10.3. The Customer Relations Team has worked diligently with complaint handlers and relevant stakeholders to ensure that Medway Council's complaints procedures and systems comply with the code. This included the implementation of a Feedback Policy.
- 10.4. [Medway Council's Feedback Policy](#) reinforces processes already in place and which can be viewed on its web page: [www.medway.gov.uk/yourfeedback](http://www.medway.gov.uk/yourfeedback). The Policy also now offers more detail, for example:
  - Who can complain, and how to complain on behalf of another person.
  - Definitions of a complaint and a service request.

- Types of complaints that can and cannot be accepted.
  - How Medway Council learns from feedback.
  - How performance is measured and how services are held accountable.
  - How we manage vexatious complaints.
- 10.5. The Policy has been through various stages of consultation, including a review by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and a Diversity Impact Assessment was completed to ensure that it did not disadvantage protected characteristic groups before being approved by the Chief Operating Officer at the Finance and Business Improvement Divisional Management Team.
- 10.6. The Policy will shortly be available to members of the public on the website.

## 11. Service Redesign of the Stage 2 Complaints Process

- 11.1. The Service Design team ran a range of workshops with the Customer Relations Team during December 2024 and January 2025. These sessions focused on understanding the current Stage 2 process, exposed the existing pain points, and designed a new “to be” process.
- 11.2. This approach is aligned with the Medway 2.0 methodology of designing the service first and then finding the appropriate technology to support the service design.
- 11.3. In this particular case, it would have been easy to start with the technology and simply re-create the current process within the JADU system. However, this would have missed many of the opportunities, and efficiencies, that the team have identified from completely redesigning the service and processes.
- 11.4. The current Stage 2 process starts from scratch every time with a new case. The new process will automatically extract the information from the original Stage 1 complaint, removing the need to “re-key” information, and reduce the associated risk of using the wrong information.
- 11.5. The new service design includes rules and logic to automate tasks, such as sending the complainant regular updates on the progress of their complaint.
- 11.6. Automations have also been added to allow the Customer Relations Team to have better oversight of the performance of services responding to complaints, with chaser emails automatically sent as deadlines approach.
- 11.7. Another key improvement from the service redesign work is the introduction of consistent response templates, to give residents a clear, structured, response where the complaint is summarised, the investigation process is explained, the decision and resolution is clearly set out, and any next steps are provided.
- 11.8. By mapping and reviewing the “as is” and “to be” processes, the team estimate that 57% of the new Stage 2 process will be fully automated, allowing staff to spend their time utilising their knowledge and expertise to improve complaints handling across the whole Council.

11.9. Now that the service has been redesigned, work has started on building the ICT system that will support it. We anticipate that the whole system will be built in-house utilising the expertise we have within our Data and Design and ICT teams.

11.10. An agile project management approach will be taken to ensure that we deliver improvements to the Stage 2 complaints process as soon as possible and then continue to apply improvements. We anticipate the first iteration of the system will go live in Q3 2025.

## 12. Risk management

12.1. Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Risk of repeat failure, reputational damage, and criticism from the Ombudsman.	Poor complaint handling, failure to prioritise complaints handling, and failure to learn from complaints.	Continue to apply good complaint handling principles as set out by the Ombudsman, implement the Feedback Policy, provide appropriate training, ensure effective complaint management by the Customer Relations Team, monitor performance, analyse complaint data, provide regular management information reports, discuss complaint performance at Complaint Handlers Group and at relevant Management Team Meetings, and continued overview of Corporate Management Team.	D IV

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

## 13. Financial implications

13.1. The cost of the Customer Relations Team, who are responsible for processing compliments, comments and complaints, is met within the existing Business Support Department budget.

## 14. Legal implications

14.1. Medway is required to have a process for complaints by the provisions of the Local Government Act 1974 and the associated guidance, however the design of the process itself is a matter for the Council to decide.

14.2. Similarly the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman was established by the same act which set out the scope of powers of the LGSCO and the framework for referrals to be made.

#### Lead officer contact

Paul Boyd, Chief Information Officer, Business Support Department (BSD)

#### Appendices

[Appendix 1](#) [Draft Medway Council Feedback Policy](#)

#### Background papers

[Local Government and Social Care Complaint Handling Code](#)