

Corporate Complaints and Customer Feedback Annual Report

For the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025



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1 Introduction

This report is for the period 1 April 2024 to the 31 March 2025 and covers corporate (non-statutory) complaints and compliments for all council direct provision and public health commissioned services. It reports on the corporate expressions of dissatisfaction/complaints/learning and compliments. Most feedback relates to Highways and Public Health.

This report does not cover the wider activity in responding to customer enquiries by other council teams such as the Customer Access Service or the Highways Enquires Team and excludes adult social care and children's complaints which are reported separately in their respective statutory complaints and feedback reports.

The council operates a 2-stage corporate complaints procedure. It can be found in full on our webpage here:

[corporate-complaints-procedure-2024.pdf](#)

Not all issues which are reported to the complaints team in the first instance are considered 'complaints'. If the matter is a first report, and the council has not yet had a chance to put the situation right, the issue will usually be considered as a 'routine service issue' and directed into 'business as usual' processes. If the matter is not the responsibility of the council, the customer will be signposted to the correct organisation, (for example District Council). If the matter is not a complaint but for action internally, the complaint team will also support the customer to be heard and receive a reply to their issue.

This report uses the terminology 'expression of dissatisfaction' (regardless of whether it is a formal complaint or not) for all issues which have been reported by customers to the complaints team.

The Ombudsman

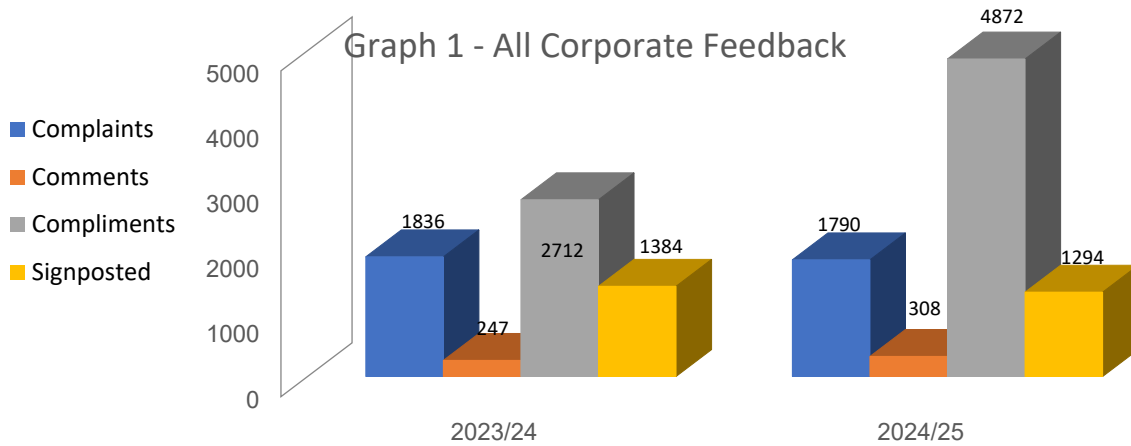
All complainants have the right to approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) for a free and independent investigation if they remain unhappy with the council outcome after Stage 2.

If you require any additional information, please contact the Complaints Team on 01772 539414 or email your request to complaintsandfeedback@lancashire.gov.uk



2. Summary of Corporate Feedback in 2024/25

Graph 1 shows that in 2024/25 a total of 1790 expressions of dissatisfaction (initial complaints) were received. Of these, 143 complaints were received by Public Health.



For every single complaint we have 2.8 compliments, but this is due to many public health related compliments (4417). The services provided through public health consistently collect the most compliments in the council.

Although Public Health complaints and compliments are included in the graph above, for the purposes of the rest of this report, public health complaints and compliments will be excluded in the figures. This is because these services are provided by many different commissioned organisations and data collection is not recorded consistently. The precise outcomes of their complaints are therefore unknown. Public Health feedback will be dealt with specifically in section 3.

The rest of this report is based on a total of 1647 expressions of dissatisfaction being received and processed by the council. Just 93 formal complaints were eventually made at Stages 1 and 2 of the corporate complaint's procedure which means that 94% of issues were resolved outside of the formal complaint procedure.

Many issues initially reported to the complaints team are signposted outside of the corporate complaint's procedure and/or the council. Signposting internally covers issues which may be for People Services, or legal (claims), whistleblowing or contracts and procurement. Signposting externally covers issues which are typically the responsibility of other organisations such as schools, District Councils, National Highways or utility companies.

There were 1294 internally signposted matters which is a 6.5% decrease from the year before which is encouraging as it suggests any problems with the implementation of the new human resources, payroll, and finance system have been resolved.

There was a slight decrease of 3% in the number of 'views' of the complaint's pages on the LCC website from 14,508 in 2023/24 to 14,132 in 2024/25. This is consistent with the similar expressions of dissatisfaction recorded over the past 2 financial years.



Out of the 1647 expressions of dissatisfaction received, 73% related to Highways (1208 individual matters).

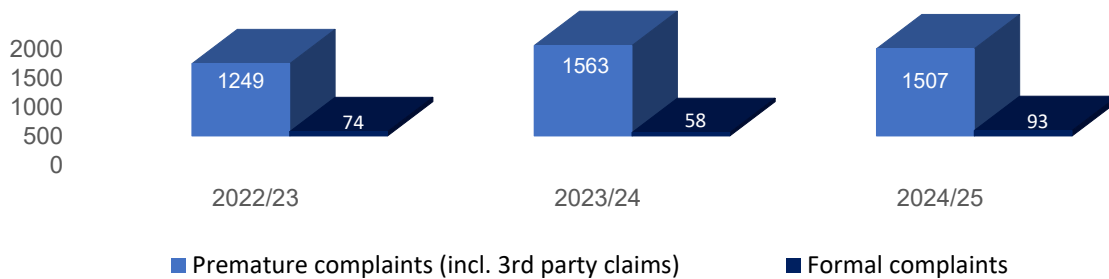
A total of 33 final decisions were made by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) in 2024/25; of these, 20 investigations were specifically about Highways and Transport, and only one was upheld (relating to the actions of enforcement agents).

Many investigations have been commissioned, and learning is outlined in Appendix 2. Recommendations have resulted in improvements to public information on our website, improved communication and engagement with customers and staff training has also been provided.

2.1 Breakdown of feedback

Graph 2 shows of the 1602 closed corporate related expressions of dissatisfaction, 86% (1376) were premature complaints and of those, 8% were third party claims, dealt with by our legal teams (131). They were resolved as part of ongoing business matters and by proactive management action. Just over 5% of matters (93) went on to become formal or informal complaints. The trend is slightly downwards for the overall number of these expressions of dissatisfaction but there's a 60% increase in the total number of formal complaints considered from 58 in 2023/24 to 93 in 2024/25.

Graph 2 - Expressions of dissatisfaction



2.2 What do people make corporate 'complaints' about?

Table 1 shows a breakdown of all the expressions of dissatisfaction. Highways and Transport continues to be the single most common reason for expressions of dissatisfaction with 1130 reports (69%). The reason that Highways attracts reports of dissatisfaction relates to the considerable size of the network and the fact that these services impact upon the entire population of Lancashire and not just those in direct receipt of council services. This also includes complaints about highways matters dealt with by the Community Service Group in the Customer Access Service. There has been a slight decrease of Highways and Transport expressions of dissatisfaction by 3% from 1160 in 2023/24. The most common reason relates to poor communication and lack of updates.

Table 1

Service area / issue	2024/25
Highways	1130
Corporate Services	74
Public and Integrated Transport	78
Education & Skills	60
Growth, Environment & Planning	93
Closed after initial enquires. (External organisation)	116
Miscellaneous	96

116 matters were closed after initial enquires as they related to external organisations.

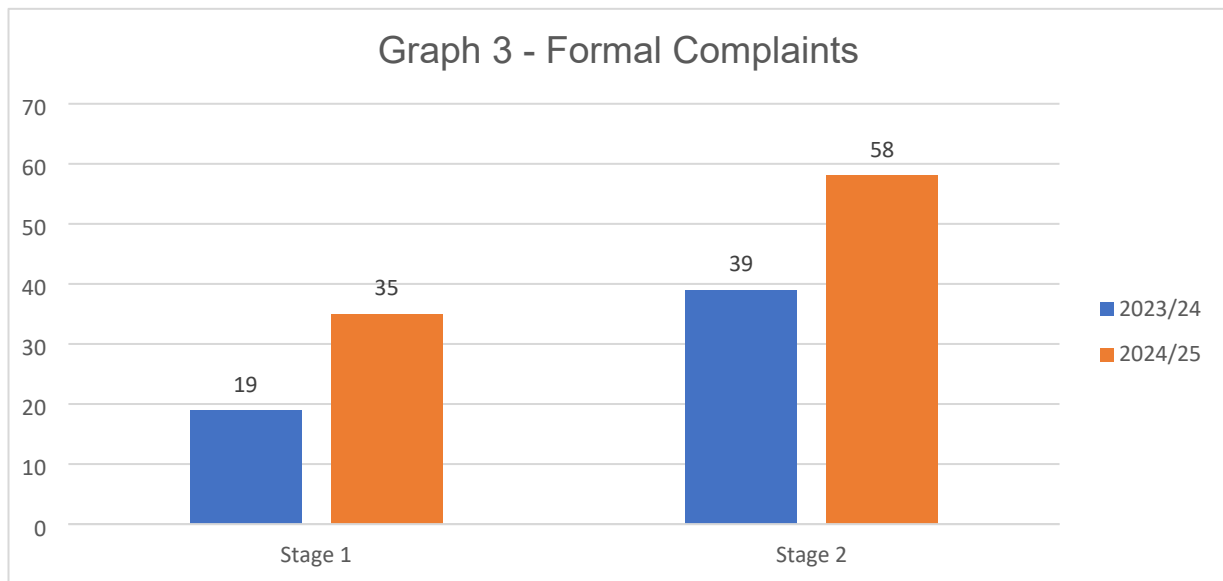
In 2023/24, there were 922 enquires signposted to the Customer Access Community Service Group. This decreased to 746 in 2024/25, which is a 19% dip in initial reports about Highways which probably reflects more people being able to self-serve.

2.3 Formal Complaints by Stage

Only 5% of matters raised with the complaints team enter the formal stages. In 2024/25 93 complaints proceeded to formal Stage 1 or Stage 2 stages. In 2023/24 this figure was 58. Therefore, in 2024/25 formal complaints increased by 60% from 2023/24. This is due to directing more Highways correspondence issues into the complaint's process when the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome. This is in line with the Local Government Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.



Graph 3 shows the increase in Stage 1 and 2 complaints.



30% of complaints were found to have some aspect justified and were therefore either upheld in full or partly upheld.

Most complaints at Stage 2 are not upheld. Of the 58 Stage 2 complaints, 12 were upheld/partially upheld and 45 were not upheld (1 remained open at the end of the reporting period). Of the complaints that were not upheld, 33 were resolved at this final point (73%), the rest went to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

2.4 Internal learning from complaints

We aim to learn from the customer voice and improve services when complaints are upheld. Many complaints can be avoided by providing regular communication with customers and by being empathetic, clear, factual, and honest in our interactions, as well as doing what we say we will do.

The council has implemented a wide range of improvements across Highways, Waste Management, Bus Services, and general communications in response to public feedback and complaints. In Highways, clearer and more timely communication with residents and councils has been prioritised, including better signage, written updates, and digital tools like QR codes and dashboards to enhance transparency and understanding. Waste Management addressed delays at recycling centres through staff retraining and contractor engagement. Bus Services improved public awareness of route changes by ensuring operators display Passenger Information Notices. Additionally, outdated or incorrect website content was updated, inappropriate links removed, and complaint handling processes strengthened, with the Complaints Team actively collaborating across departments to embed lessons learned and prevent escalation. Customer feedback also informs local action plans. More detail in relation to the changes we made are outlined in Appendix 2.



3. Public Health Commissioned Services

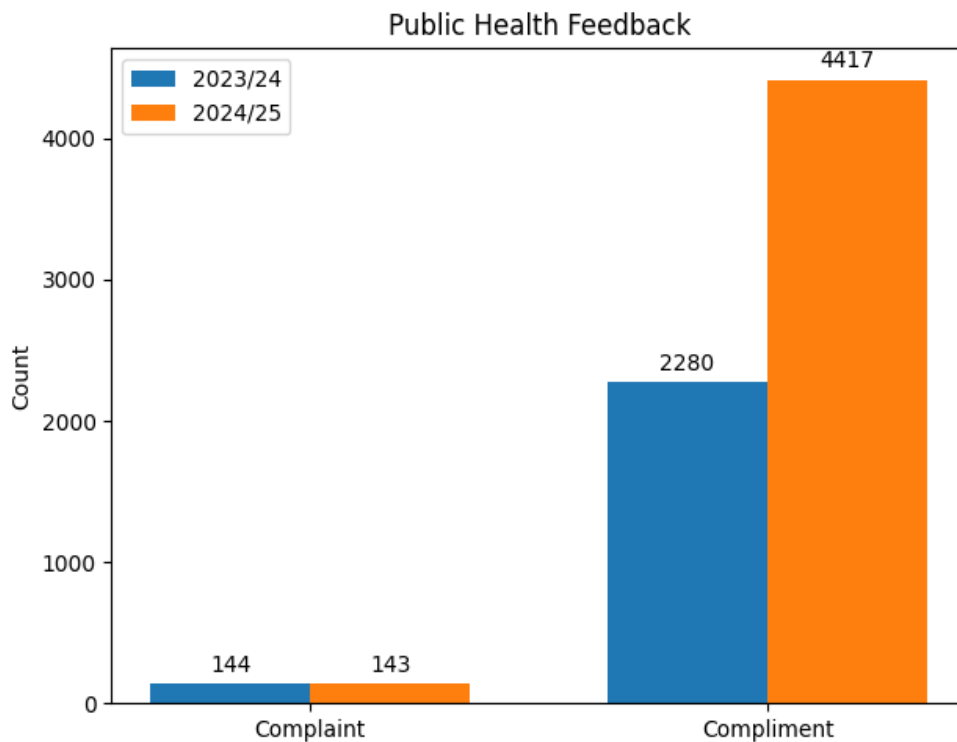
Public Health (PH) services are provided to the public through commissioned providers. However, as the council is responsible for the quality of these services, the performance of these contracts is monitored, and providers report back quarterly on their performance.

It is important to know about the performance of our contracts and that complaints procedures are accessible to the public.

3.1 Breakdown of PH Feedback

Graph 4 shows that while the number of complaints remained nearly the same, compliments almost doubled in 2024/25. However, this is probably due to better recording and the fact that commissioned providers are open to customer feedback and want to learn from customer experiences.

Graph 4 Public Health Feedback



3.2 PH Compliments

A third of all complaints were for FCMS a Social Enterprise health and wellbeing services provider, which runs NHS Health Checks in local communities, workplaces, and places of worship to help prevent illness and improve long-term health. People praised the service as kind, informative, and convenient.

Lancaster University provides training to help school staff support their own and students' mental wellbeing and they received 11% of the compliments. Their feedback highlighted how useful and engaging their training was.

Safenet and partners, who offer safe housing and support for people escaping domestic abuse, received 10% of the compliments. Change Grow Live, who support adults with substance misuse recovery, also received 10% of compliments.

Further details of compliments can be found in Appendix 1.

3.3 PH Complaints and Learning

Safenet and partners recorded 70 complaints, which included concerns about confidentiality and documentation. Some of the upheld complaints on this subject led to staff training.

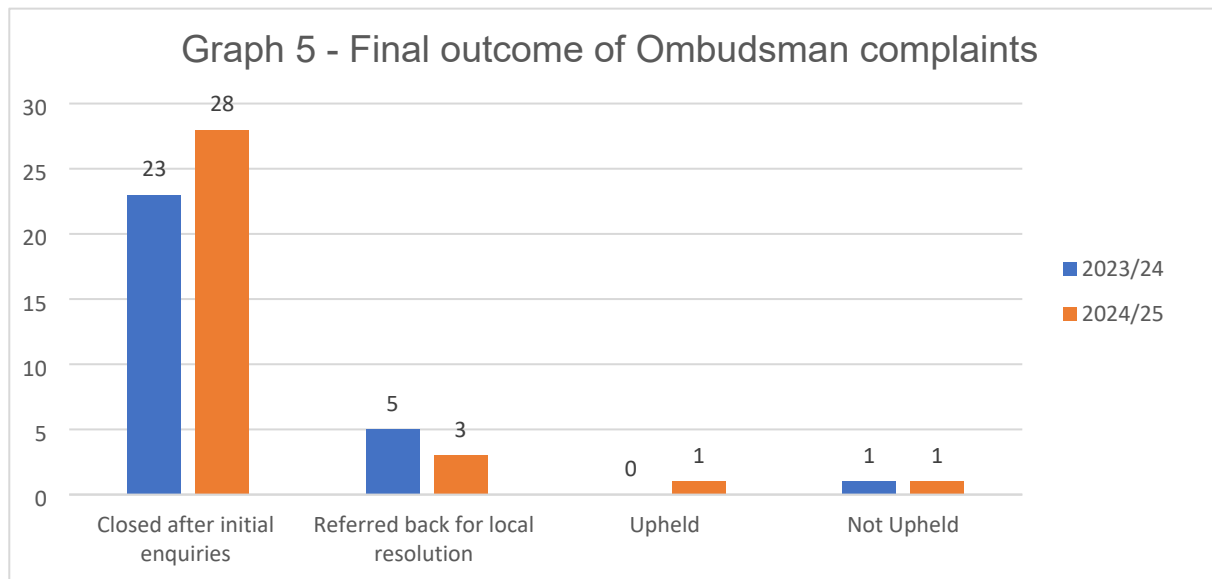
Change Grow Live received 32 complaints, which were mostly about communication and appointment issues. These were resolved with apologies and better scheduling.



4. Ombudsman Complaints

Sometimes complaints are not upheld at Stage 2, and people remain dissatisfied. A total of 40 corporate complaint enquires were received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25. Of these 33 separate corporate complaints were investigated (compared with 29 in 2023/24). This is a slight increase.

Graph 5 shows the outcome of corporate complaints closed within the year (33 in total).



Of the 33 complaints, 20 investigations (61%) were about highways and transport. This is by far the biggest theme. Other investigations were about corporate services, planning, environmental services, public protection and regulation.

Of the 33 investigations undertaken, only one was upheld about the actions of an enforcement agent, employed by the council, who removed and sold her car for an unpaid parking fine, without her knowledge. The Ombudsman found some fault with the actions of the enforcement agents in failing to contact the complainant. As a remedy we agreed to make a symbolic payment of £250.

Most Ombudsman investigations (85%) are closed after initial enquiries. This is a very positive outcome which shows that our internal local processes for resolving customer reports of dissatisfaction and closing corporate complaints stand up to external audit and scrutiny.

There were no Ombudsman public reports in 2024/25 which is also positive for the reputation of the council. We therefore consider that our processes for considering corporate complaints at Stages 1 and 2 are proportionate and fair.



5. Next steps and priorities

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has published a new **Complaint Handling Code** (the Code) which councils are expected to implement before 1 April 2026. The council will therefore work towards the consideration and adoption of the Code which sets out the national local government framework for fair, timely, and effective complaint handling, aiming to foster a positive complaints culture and drive service improvements.

Key recommendations include:

- **Clear definitions** distinguishing complaints from service requests.
- A **two-stage process**: Stage 1 (investigation and response) and Stage 2 (review)
- **Clear timescales**: the Code recommends 15 working days from receipt of the complaint at Stage 1 and 25 working days at Stage 2.
- A “**comply or explain**” **principle**, allowing flexibility only in exceptional cases, with clear justification and timelines.
- **Improved transparency**, including signposting complainants to the Ombudsman when necessary.
- **Dedicated complaints teams** treated as core services, not burdened with unrelated duties.
- **Quarterly performance reporting**, training, and updated templates to support consistent complaint handling.
- **Contractual clarity** for complaint handling in commissioned services.

Councils must **embed learning from complaints**, engage with complainants for feedback, and align their policies with the Code unless they have a valid reason not to.

As part of this work, the council is also developing a replacement complaints and feedback IT system to manage increased demand and work towards compliance with the new Code. Directors and senior leaders will additionally raise the profile of complaints handling with their managers to ensure appropriate capacity and resources to work effectively with the Complaints Team and ensure that we can continue to fulfil our obligations to the public.



Appendix 1: Examples of Compliments

Waste Management: Chorley Recycling Centre

"I just wanted to say a big thank you to an LCC staff member - I visited the Chorley Recycling Centre today with my elderly Dad to help him clear rubbish (we go every two weeks) and a blonde female LCC staff member was superb and helped my dad with the bags and helped me remove some old mattress toppers. She was so caring and lovely and a credit to LCC. My Dad is frail and has a tremor and this lady was superb with him and encouraging. She went above and beyond. I know you must receive lots of complaints, but I hope this thank you reaches LCC and the staff member in question."

Registrars

"we would be grateful if you could pass on a big thank you to the celebrants/registrars for their exceptional service during our marriage ceremony. Even though we had planned for a laid-back ceremony, we were nevertheless nervous. But they accommodated for our quirks with warmth and professionalism and they helped us navigate our wedding day with ease. They also went above and beyond by helping out with photo taking (and the photos turned out amazing!). We are incredibly grateful for the significant part they played in our celebration and they really helped to make the day exceed our expectations."

Libraries

Barnoldswick Library.

"I'd like to extend heartfelt thanks and praise to the librarian on duty at Barnoldswick Library. I witnessed their kindness and attentiveness in helping an older visitor who was looking to make friends at the library's coffee morning, while I was collecting some books. It was truly commendable. It was a beautiful reminder that libraries are more than just buildings filled with books - they are places of connection, compassion, and community."

Moments like this show just how vital our libraries are. They provide not only knowledge and resources but also warmth, belonging, and opportunities for people of all ages to come together. In a time when loneliness's a growing concern, especially for older people, the welcoming environment created by library staff can make a world of difference."

Thank you to the librarian for their empathy and for showing what public service is all about. You helped someone feel seen, valued, and included - and that's more powerful than any bestseller."

St. Annes Library

"I visited the office at St. Annes Library to register the death of my relative. My mother has dementia, and I hold my mother's LPA to act on her behalf. I took my mother with me as she wanted to be involved in the process and was obviously upset at the death of her husband. We were seen by B, who in short was AMAZING! She very quickly identified my mother's dementia and treated her with care and compassion. B was extremely helpful, efficient, and friendly, which to be honest has not always been my experience with councils in the past. B made a very emotional process for my mother a pleasant one. In a world where 90% of employees don't care, or don't even know how to do their jobs, B has restored my faith that there are still some employees who are excellent. B is a credit to Lancs council and epitomises your values and commitment to good customer service. I just wanted to let someone know what an outstanding job B does."



Highways

Pavement repairs

"I just want to pass on some praise for the Highways team. I got home at around 12:30 and noticed a concrete bollard had been knocked over and ripped up the pavement and was causing a hazard. Reported it through Customer Access and the Highways team was on site by 13:10."

Roadworks

"I would like you to pass on my thanks please to the roadworks team who did the upgrade on Rockliffe Rd, Bacup over the last few weeks. I am quite disabled and some days I have had some appointments. The team have been amazing, allowing my mum to collect me from and return me to my doorstep. Once when I couldn't get close, the team made sure I was able to walk with their assistance. I am grateful for their help to allow me and my mum access even when works were ongoing. All of them deserve credit for this. Thank you very much."

Resurfacing

"Please pass this message on to the team responsible for the recent resurfacing work on Preston Road, Chorley. We wanted to express our sincere appreciation for the excellent job carried out over the past few nights. The team worked quickly, professionally, and with great care. The site was kept tidy and well-organised, and the quality of the resurfacing is outstanding, making a significant improvement to the road surface.

We also greatly appreciated the consideration shown in maintaining access to our properties during the work. Please pass on our heartfelt thanks to everyone involved."

Gritting

"Now that we have come out of the Winter season, I must congratulate the council in the way they gritted and kept the roads open during this period. I live in a rural location in Lancashire and the roads were constantly well gritted and when we did have snow the roads were kept open with snowploughs. This has not always been the case so well done, please pass on my compliments."

Public health services

"I found the training very informative, and I will be applying strategies we discussed. It has really made me think about how I can support pupils in my class, but also how to support myself."

"The session was amazing! It was so hands-on, really informative, and I loved the practical activities"



Appendix 2: Learning from corporate complaints and feedback.

Highways:

- a. We've learned that homeowners need clearer communication before and during scheduled works, so we have improved how and when we share updates with impacted residents.
- b. We've learned that streetlight signs are often missed, so we're increasing the use of clearer metal road signs to display information about upcoming works.
- c. We've learned that road users want better visibility of roadworks, so we're using technologies like QR codes to provide instant access to online updates.
- d. We've learned that letters and postcards to residents can be inconsistent, so we've improved the quality and reliability of written communications.
- e. We've learned that gaps between phases of work cause confusion, so we have introduced new letters and postcards to explain when and why we'll return.
- f. We've learned that local councils need more timely information, so we're strengthening communication channels to help them support residents and reduce queries.
- g. We've learned that residents want transparency about why certain roads are resurfaced, so we have provided an online dashboard and videos to explain our decision-making.
- h. We've learned that our carbon reduction efforts aren't well understood, so we're launching bite-sized campaigns to highlight our sustainable practices and priorities.
- i. We investigated incidents in relation to the alleged misconduct of several Highways employees and acted in relation to our human resources procedures when appropriate.

Waste Management

In a complaint about time taken on a trip to one of our recycling centres we apologised to the customer and:

- retrained staff and managers on the requirements of managing skip exchanges and minimising inconvenience for customers;
- raised the issue of driver training and operating efficiency with our transport contractor; and
- trained staff on complaint handling.



Bus Services

A complaint was made about lack of information regarding changes to the bus service route not being displayed on the bus or Bus Services website. As the council subsidises these services, we asked for bus operators to print out the PINs (Passenger Information Notices) we provide to them to display on their buses, so passengers are made aware of all changes in good time.

This process is now used for all changes to bus services that we subsidise going forward so that information is more accessible to the public.

Other actions

- a. Several changes were made to various webpages on the Council website because of feedback in relation to outdated, inaccurate or incorrect information. In response, dead links were reinstated and information updated to make public information clearer to the public.
- b. A link to the Lancashire County Council website on the internet was removed after the original website it came from was shut down and was taken over by an inappropriate site.
- c. We implemented monitoring mechanisms to tell complainants of delays caused by the complexity of the investigated matters at stage 2 of the complaint's procedure.
- d. The Complaints Team:
 - holds regular meetings with the Highways Enquiry Team and Customer Access Community Service Group.
 - amplifies the customer voice within services to ensure complainants are heard and areas of dissatisfaction are responded to,
 - provides training and works closely with all council teams to resolve complaints at the lowest possible level in order to prevent escalation within the complaints process; and
 - works with services to identify and embed lessons learnt from upheld complaints.

