

## London Borough of Enfield

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<b>Report Title</b>	2022/23 Corporate Complaints Annual Report & MEQ Performance
<b>Report to</b>	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> March 2024
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Ergin Erbil
<b>Executive Director / Director</b>	Perry Scott, Executive Director of Environment & Communities
<b>Report Author</b>	Eleanor Brown/Lee Shelsher
<b>Ward(s) affected</b>	None
<b>Classification</b>	Part 1 Public

### **Purpose of Report**

1. This report is in response to Overview & Scrutiny Committee's request in November 23 for the following performance data:
  - Corporate Complaints Annual Report 2022/23
  - Corporate Complaints 2023/24 in-year quarterly KPI data
  - Member Enquiries (MEQs) 2022/23
  - Member Enquiries (MEQs) 2023/24 in-year quarterly KPI data
  - MEQ KPI performance comparison prior and post new MEQ IT system implementation (May 2022)

### **Main Considerations for the Panel**

#### Corporate Complaints

2. During 2022/23, Enfield Council received 1,999 complaints, of which 153 progressed to final stage. Complaint volumes have marginally decreased from the previous year.
3. The average annual first stage complaint response rate was 72% within 10 working days. As the Council's complaint response time performance target is 95% within 10 working days, this Key Performance Indicator (KPI) was not achieved, part due to an in-year halving of the Council's response targets from 20 to 10 working days. This marked the return to best practice following a temporary target time which had been enacted due to Covid-19. Therefore, KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for the previous two years is difficult to compare.

4. In terms of late responses, the highest percentage were just 1-5 days late (34%) showing that this can be tightened to achieve deadlines.
5. Due to technology improvements, the annual report also includes the number of complaints upheld, partially upheld, and not upheld for the first time. This enhances the Council's ability to focus on targeted improvement actions regarding service faults. Of the first stage complaints received: 792 (43%) were upheld, 424 (23%) were partially upheld and 627 (34%) were not upheld.
6. Moving forward, the report details planned improvement actions, including a targeted approach for high volume, low response times to improve this, alongside quality and service delivery. This includes enhanced staff training and induction programmes, complaints and MEQ service redesigns, recruitment drives and improved customer communication processes.
7. At a corporate level, changes to staff structures, processes and systems were implemented during 2022-23 to improve resilience and ownership of complaints handling. Therefore, the centralised Complaints Team have growing corporate oversight which is reflected in response performance. The structure and leadership have been reviewed again in February 2024 to make further improvements.
8. Further analysis for 2022/23 is included in 'Background & Options' and the Annual Corporate Complaints Report link is included as an appendix.
9. In terms of in-year Corporate Complaints on time response performance for 2023/24, the average is currently 73% with an average time of 9 working days. Although performance improved to 78% in Q2, this fell to 70% in Q3 where over 10% of responses were just 1 day overdue. Actions to reduce lateness are currently being implemented in the central complaints team to support responding officers and increase KPI performance. Further analysis is required around complaint versus use of a service request.

#### Member Enquiries (MEQs)

10. During 2022/23, Enfield Council received 6,962 MEQs, 79% of which were responded to on time. As the on-time response KPI target is 95% within 8 working days, the target was not achieved.
11. The three highest volume MEQ categories were: Street Cleansing (329), Council Housing Repairs (311) and Parks & Cemeteries Maintenance (307). **Please see paragraph 50** for further data on services.
12. As part of the new IT system implemented for MEQs, it is now possible for Members to accept or reject an MEQ response. From May 2022 (when the system was implemented), 1,562 responses were accepted, and 480 responses were rejected by Members.
13. In terms of in-year performance Q1-Q3 on time response average is 82%. The average response time across the year to date is 7 working days.

Compared to the two previous years (pre-IT system implementation and year of implementation), performance is more consistent and less volatile in terms of peaks & troughs. Each quarter of the current year has performance between 80 – 83%. This is also (thus far) the highest performance in all of the last five years bar one (2020-21). In terms of volume 23/24 quarterly average is 1,974 which is slightly below the quarterly average of 21/22 of 2,079 (prior to the implementation) and higher than the implementation year (22/23 – 1,538). This indicates a positive, stable trend on KPI performance post IT system implementation.

14. Future improvement actions are focused on IT enhancements and staff structural/leadership changes. As Environment and Communities Directorate includes Customer Solutions, new approaches to the complaints and MEQ service will include deliverables such as outbound contact of customers to support deadlines and further liaison with services via the contact centre/webchat. During 2024/25, the MEQ team will be recentralised (moving departmental satellite support teams back into the central Complaints & Access to Information Service). A central point of contact will be created so that Members can escalate issues, queries, concerns to a named officer within the central team, ensuring faster problem resolution.
15. Digital Services are working on enhancements. We have booked an appropriate system health check with the supplier to make recommendations for improvements to the system based on user experience.
16. Over a year Digital Services have corrected/updated over 30 service requests ranging from individual access to the system, reporting improvements, changing processes to updating MEQ categories.

## **Background and Options**

### **Corporate Complaints Annual Report 2022/23**

17. The Corporate Complaints Annual Report covers the period of 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. It focuses on the nature of complaints received by the Council, handling performance and learning elicited to shape future service improvements. It also provides insight into compliments received during the same period. The report is available on the Council's website. Link in appendix below.
18. The report content has changed compared to previous years to provide improved insight and learning such as additional year trend analysis, and upheld rates.
19. In addition, the Annual Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaints Report and the Housing Ombudsman Service letter are now incorporated into the Annual Corporate Complaints Report to provide a holistic overview of complaints and learning.
20. The Annual Statutory Complaint reports for Adults and Children Social Care are produced separately to the Corporate Complaints report as this type of

complaints are processed and monitored under a specific statutory framework. The Children's Social Care report has been produced and the Adults Social Care report is nearing completion. These will be presented to the relevant Scrutiny Panels by the end of November 2023.

21. Serving circa 330,000 residents (6th highest in London) Enfield Council's initial customer contact volumes alone are significant. During 2022/23, the organisation received nearly 530,000 calls, handled over 62,000 web chats, and supported 41,000 customers face-to-face. Over 8.5 million webpages were viewed and over 169,000 online service request and payment forms submitted by customers.
22. Additionally, the Council collected approximately 840,000 bins per month (all waste types - refuse, recycling, food & garden); managed 10,044 social housing properties; processed 84,000 Housing Benefit changes and 196,000 Council Tax Support changes; supported 7,750 households regarding benefit and debt assistance; and processed 3,470 homelessness applications.

### Complaint Themes

23. High volume service areas (100 complaints or more) were Waste Services, Council Housing Repairs and Council Tax. These service areas are mostly reflected in the high volumes from the previous year and represent high contact service areas. However, both Waste Services and Council Housing Repair complaint volumes have decreased compared to the previous year. Waste Services has reduced from 661 in 2021/22 to 132 in 2022/23; whilst Council Housing Repairs has decreased from 264 in 2021/22 to 199 in 2022/23.
24. These improvements can be apportioned to the implemented actions included in the previous annual report. This year's improvement actions will build on these successes.
25. For Council Tax 25 complaints were upheld. These related to refund delays, charging/liability errors, errors updating account information and liabilities.
26. For Waste Services, 35 complaints were upheld. These related to missed bin collections (including both repeat and one-off missed bin collections), staff conduct, timing of collections and general service quality.
27. For Council Housing Repairs, 59 complaints were upheld. These related to repair delays, compensation delays, staff conduct, major works and unsatisfactory repairs.
28. There was some correlation with Member Enquiries (MEQs) raised during 2022/23. Notably, Council Housing Repairs received the second highest volume of MEQs (311). High volume MEQs relating to Waste Services, included street cleansing which received the highest volume of MEQs (329) and fly-tipping which received the sixth highest volume (221).

## Ombudsman Complaints

29. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) received 129 complaints relating to Enfield Council and investigated 28 of these. Both decreased in volume compared to the previous year. The Ombudsman upheld 22 complaints, a slight increase in upheld rate from the previous year. However, this is due in part to the LGSCO targeting investigation work more narrowly as highlighted in their annual letter:

*“Changes in uphold rates this year are not solely down to the nature of the cases coming to us. We are less likely to carry out investigations on ‘borderline’ issues, so we are naturally finding a higher proportion of fault overall.”*

30. The LGSCO acknowledged an improvement in Enfield Council’s response times. However, several responses required extensions of time agreed with the Ombudsman. These extensions have decreased compared to the previous year, and work is ongoing to continue to reduce these extensions over the coming year.

31. Of the 22 upheld complaints, LGSCO recommended improvement actions centred on reviewing policies and procedures as well as providing further training and guidance to staff. The LGSCO annual performance letter noted 100% satisfaction that Enfield Council had implemented these recommendations accordingly.

32. During 22/23, there was an increase in complainants escalating requests to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) compared to the previous year. Of the 37 complaints received, HOS chose to investigate 11 of these regarding Council Housing Repairs, anti-social behaviour, and tenancy issues. 6 were upheld, a rate of 85%. The previous years’ rate was around 80%.

33. Additionally, Enfield Council has improved its response time performance compared to the previous year. There were fewer time extension requests made and agreed with HOS.

## Complaints Learning & Improvement Actions

34. Complaints learning from 2022/23 has informed a series of specific service level action plans to improve response times, quality, and service delivery, linked to the three areas referred to above. These include enhanced staff training and induction programmes, service redesigns, recruitment drives and improved customer communication processes to enhance service delivery and reduce the initial complaints received.

35. This year’s improvement actions again also build on actions that were implemented from the previous report, during 21/22.

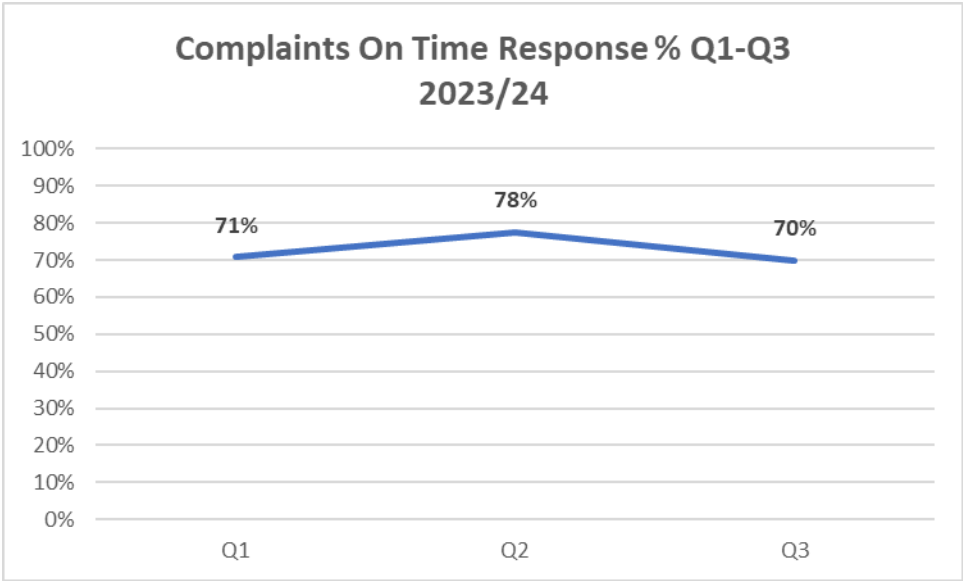
36. For Council Housing Repairs, the service is implementing several actions to improve their handling of complaints, response times and ensuring a holistic approach to resolving problems and complex cases. Customer communication templates have been revised and additional staff training is

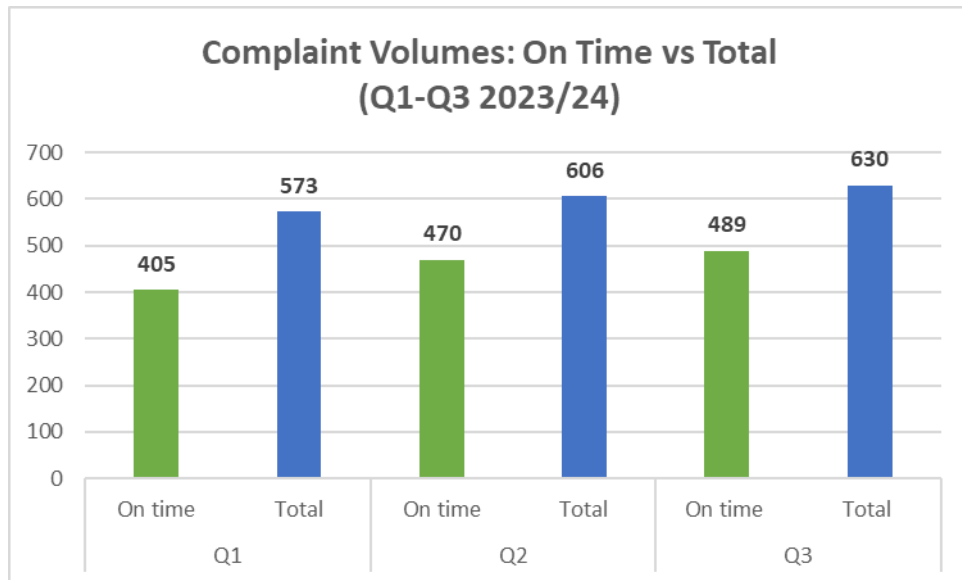
underway to improve customer experience. The service has also strengthened processes to review complaints learning and enhance targeted improvement actions.

- 37. For Council Tax, communicating to customers how complex processes such as recovering arrears and raising awareness on new financial support schemes is a key priority. In addition to regular updates online (website and social media), the service is improving their customer correspondence to ensure clarity of messaging and processes. Comprehensive training for new officers is ongoing and refresher training is now available as required.
- 38. For Waste Services, a customer experience transformation project has delivered several improvements, particularly in relation to repeat missed bin collections. These include embedding technology to ensure real-time reporting from crews to customers and the Contact Centre regarding individual collections and reasons as to why some bins are not collected.

**Corporate Complaints 2023/24 Quarterly KPI Response Data**

- 39. Between April to December 2023, Enfield Council has received 1,809 corporate complaints.
- 40. The average on time response rate for the same period is 73%. The following graphs show the quarterly KPI on time response volumes, percentages and total numbers received.





41. Performance improved from Q1 to Q2. However, this dropped in Q3 where just over 10% of the late responses were 1 day late.

42. To address this, the central Complaints service are implementing the following actions:

- The complaints team have begun liaising with high volume services, and those particularly missing any deadlines, to customise admin arrangement and provide the best support to help these services achieve the response times
- The service is looking at ways to further increase proactive chasing of complaints and MEQs before they are due, including synergies with other teams (e.g. contact centre)

### **MEQ Performance 2022/23**

43. This section of the report provides data regarding Member Enquiry (MEQ) performance between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

#### MEQ Volumes

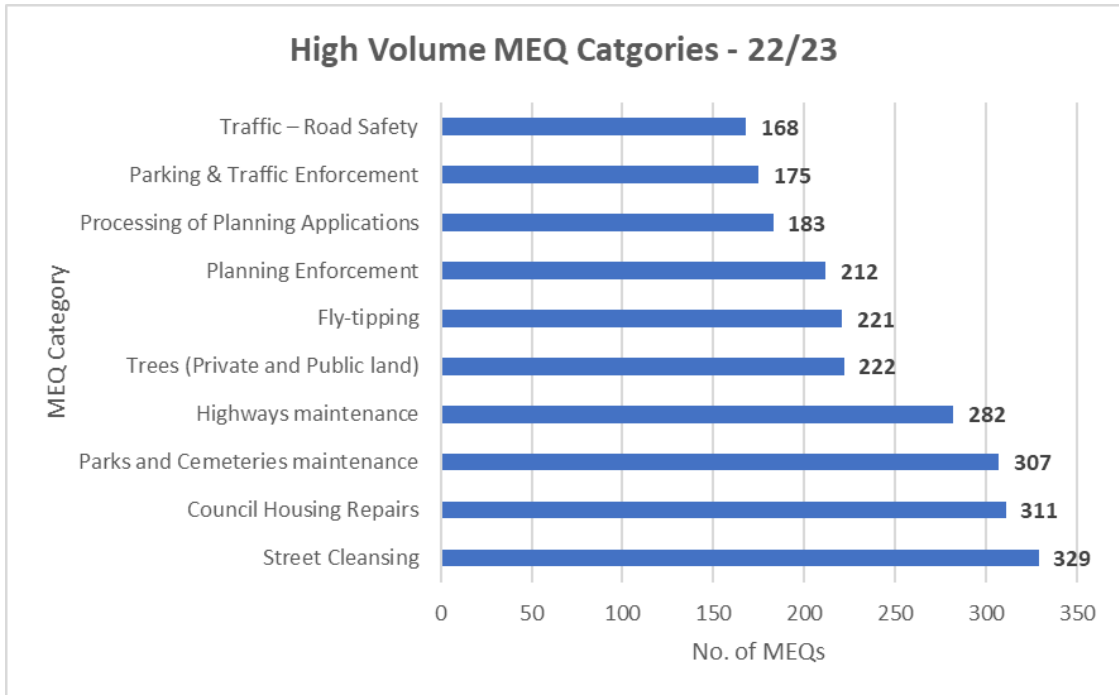
44. In 2022/23, London Borough of Enfield (LBE) received 6,962 MEQs:

- 5,440 submitted by LBE Members.
- 1,522 submitted by MPs.

This equates to a daily average of 19 MEQs.

45. Compared to 21/22, MEQ volumes have decreased by 922. MP MEQs have increased by 45, whilst LBE Member MEQs have decreased by 967.

46. In terms of individual MEQ category volume the graph overleaf shows the top 10 MEQ category volumes during 22/23:

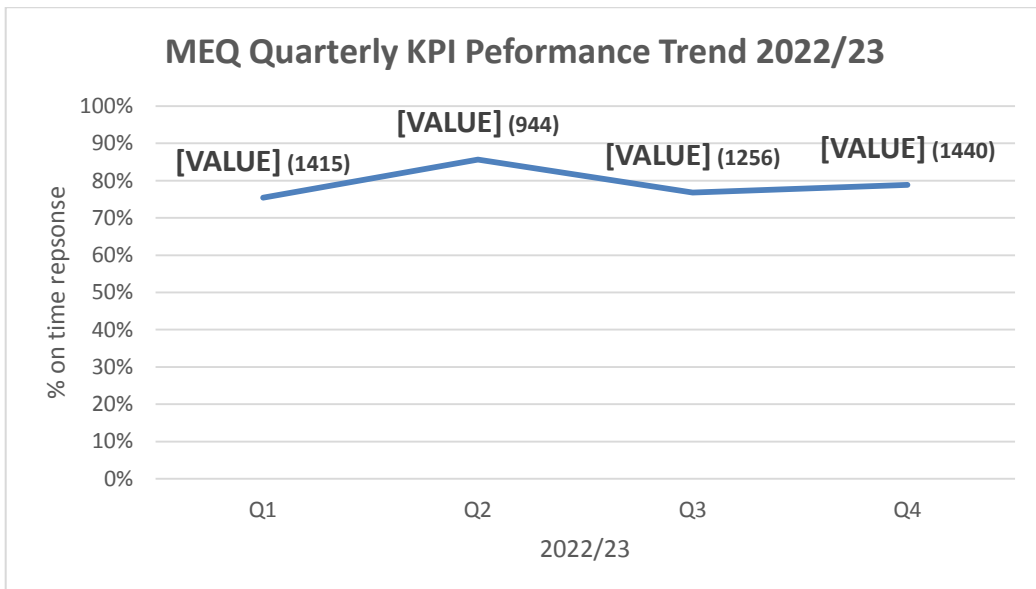


### MEQ Response Time Performance

47. Enfield Council's Key Performance Indicator (KPI) target response time is 95% within 8 working days.

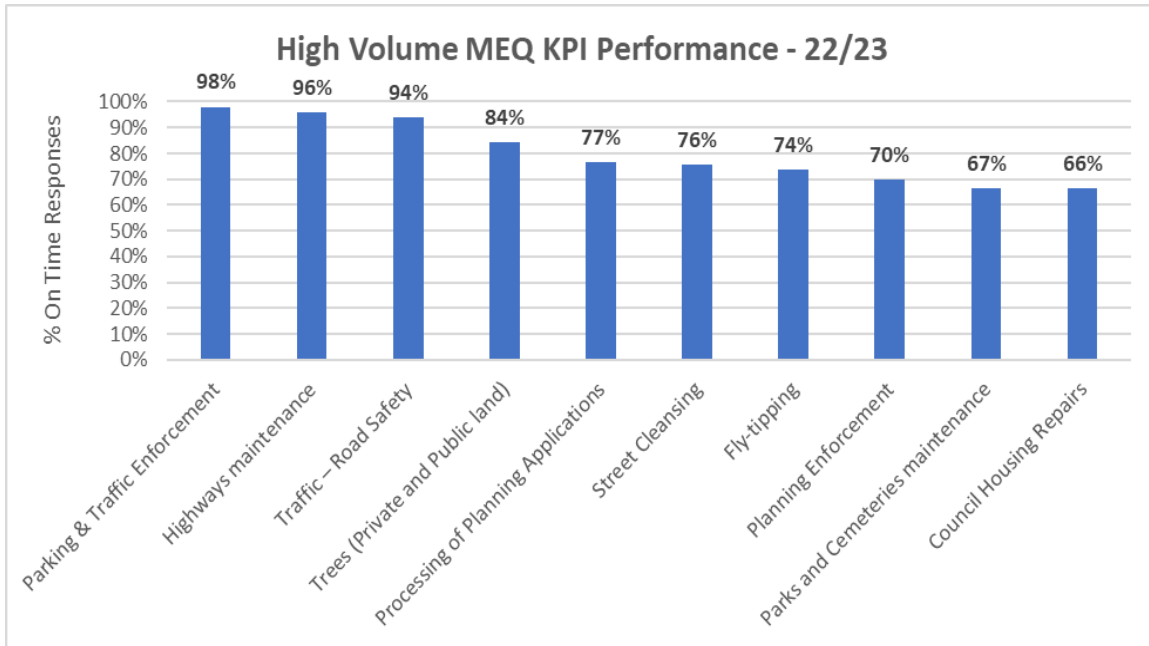
48. For 2022/23, the annual on time response performance was 79%. This is the same KPI performance for the previous year, 2021/22 (79%).

49. The graph below provides the quarterly performance trend





50. The graph below identifies the MEQ on time response rate for the top 10 high volume MEQ categories.



51. Street Cleansing received the highest MEQ volume yet is 6<sup>th</sup> place with a 76% on time achievement rate. Council Housing Repairs received the second highest volume and the lowest on time performance at 66%. Parks & Cemeteries maintenance was in a similar position with the third highest volume and second lowest on time performance at 67%. Planning Enforcement received the eighth highest MEQ volume yet was fourth in terms of low on time performance at 70%.

52. In contrast, Highways maintenance is fourth in terms of volume but second highest in performance at 96% hitting the Council's target of 95% MEQ performance. Additionally, Parking and Traffic enforcement exceeds the Council's performance target at 98%, although it received the second lowest volume of the top 10 categories (175).

### MEQ Response Quality

53. The new MEQ system now allows Members to accept or reject the initial MEQ response from officers. For the first time, the Council is now able to measure quality of response as well as response times.

54. Between 1<sup>st</sup> May 2023 (when the new system went live) and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023:

- 1,562 responses were accepted.
- 480 responses were rejected.

55. The most common reasons for rejection were due to a lack of detail or not fully responding to the questions or the accuracy of the response being challenged by the Member or resident. However, when the system was first introduced, Members did not have the option to ask for more information and therefore some rejections were due to the Member requiring additional information or asking follow-up questions.

56. This was identified as a systems enhancement post go live and subsequently implemented in March 2023. Therefore, although the third response ('asking for additional information/follow-up question) is not available for 22/23 performance monitoring, this will be included in future MEQ annual performance reports for 2023/24 onwards.

57. In terms of high MEQ response rejections in 22/23, as expected, the high volume MEQ categories feature prominently:

- Parks & Cemeteries maintenance = 40 rejections (13%)
- Traffic – Road Safety = 27 rejections (16%)
- Council Housing Repairs = 26 rejections (8.4%)
- Street Cleansing = 22 rejections (6.3%)
- Processing of Planning Applications = 18 (9.8%)

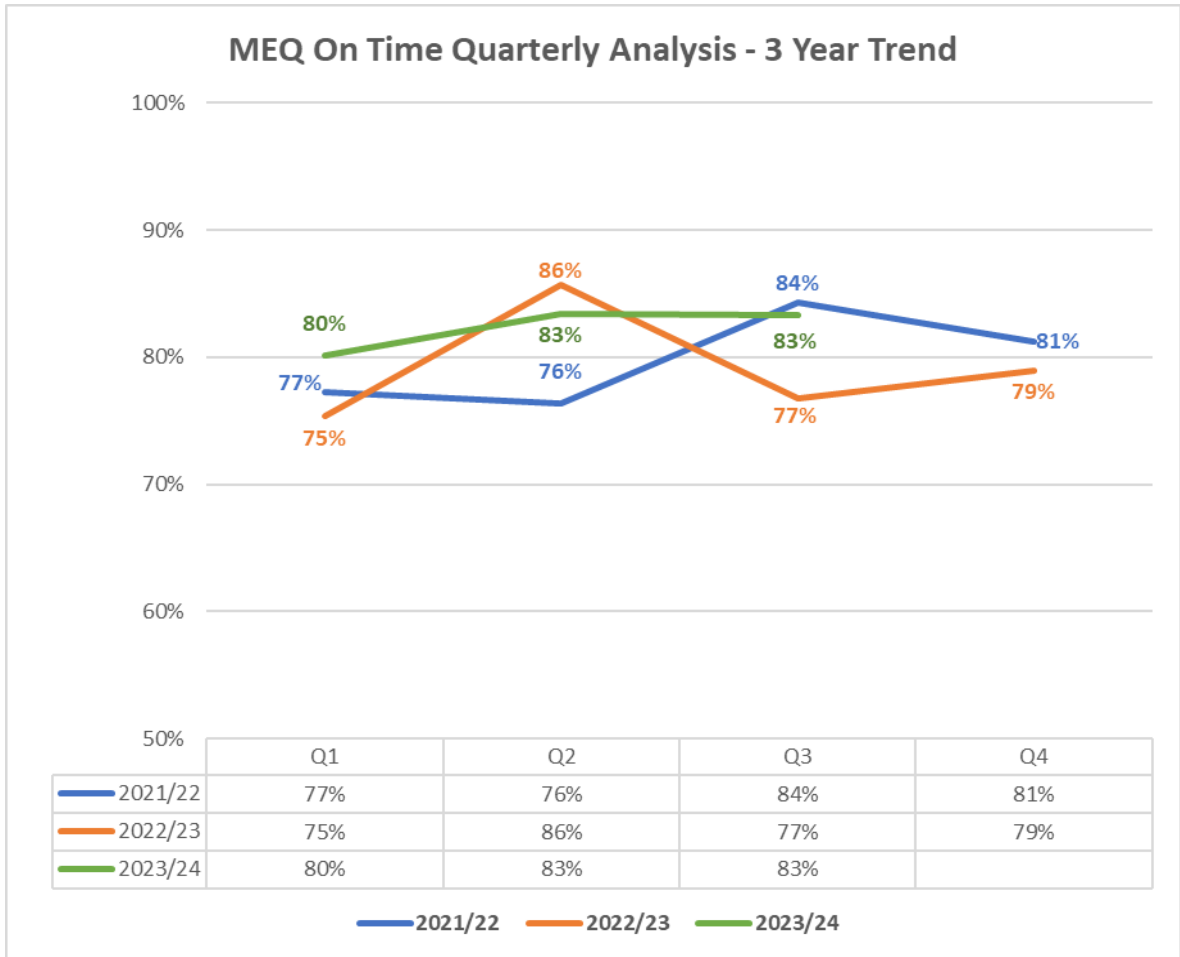
### **MEQ Annual Performance Trend 2021/22 to 2023/24**

58. In May 2022, Enfield Council changed technology, people and processes regarding the submission and handling of MEQs. A new MEQ IT system was introduced whereby Members submit their enquiry online. These enquiries are fed into a new case management system operated by officers. With the new technology, the central MEQ team was disbanded as MEQ responding officers access and manage their MEQs directly on the new case management system. Smaller MEQ support functions were created in 3 departments to support responding officers and Members.

59. This section of the report provides an MEQ KPI performance data before and after the new MEQ IT system implementation as requested by Overview & Scrutiny Committee in November 2023.

60. It should be noted that a full financial year analysis post implementation is not yet available as this period ends April 2024. However, the first 3 financial quarters of data are available and included in this report. Therefore, to support comparison analysis, data is provided quarterly across the 3 years.

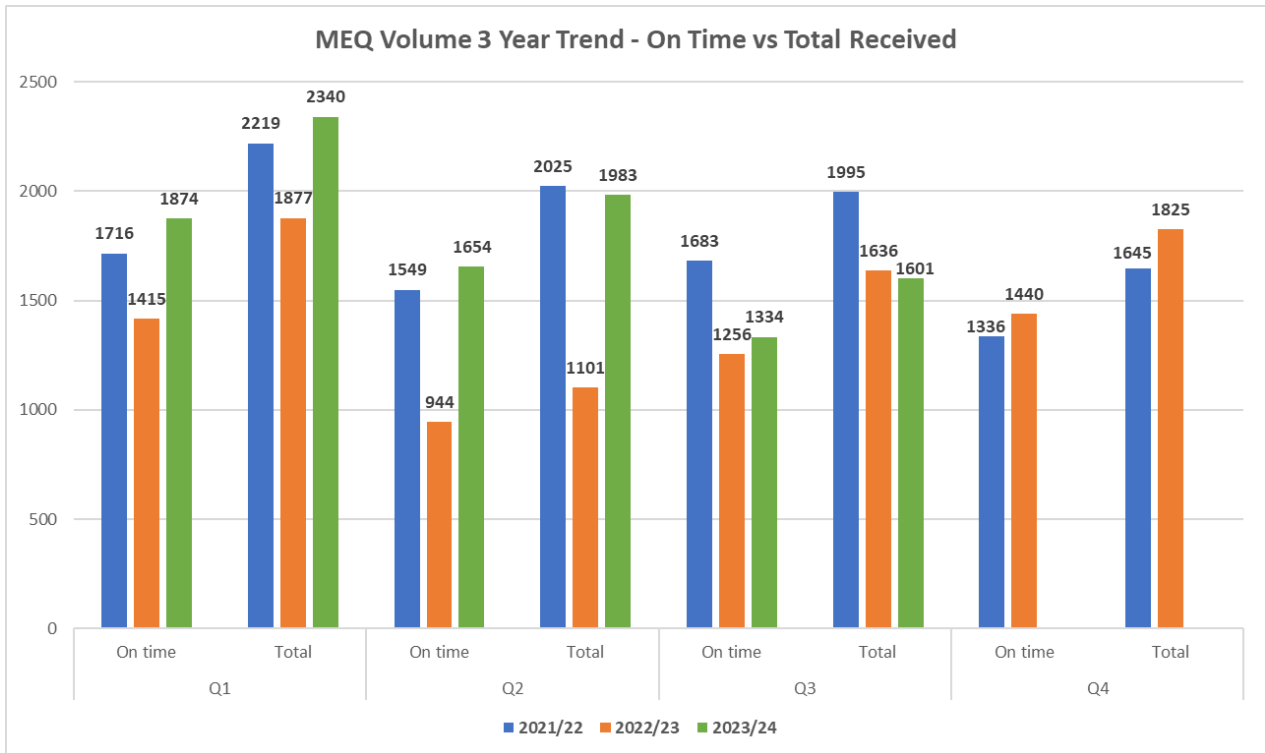
61. The graph overleaf provides the quarterly KPI performance between 2021/22 to 2023/24:



62. Prior and post MEQ IT system implementation, there are peaks and troughs in terms of on time performance. Although 2023/24 data does not include Q4, performance is much steadier compared to the two previous years. Prior to the IT system implementation, average annual performance was 80%. In the following year when the system was implemented this dropped to 79%. So far in 2023/24, the quarterly average has risen to 82%.

63. However, as the Q4 data for 23/24 is not available, Q1-Q3 KPI data only over the 3-year period enables a like-for-like comparison. Through this lens, 21/22 & 22/23 quarterly KPI performance average are both 79%. The highest is 23/24 quarterly KPI performance average of 82%.

64. However, volumes should also be considered when analysing KPI performance. Therefore, the graph overleaf provides a breakdown of MEQ volumes per quarter across the three-year period:



65. During 2021/22, a total of 7,884 MEQs were received. In 2022/23, this decreased to 6,439. 2023/24 is not yet complete, but current volume at the close of Q3 is 5,924. As the average is per quarter is 1,974 per quarter, should this continue, forecasts indicated a total volume of over 7,800 for 2023/24.

66. As per the comparison challenges outlined previously, as 2023/24 data is incomplete, comparing Q1 to Q3 across the 3 financial years improves comparison accuracy. 2021/22 remains highest at 6,239. 2023/24 is second highest at 5,924 and 2022/23 received the lowest volume of 4,614.

67. Combining time performance rates and volumes, the highest performing quarter was Q2 in 22/23. However, the volume data shows this was the lowest MEQ volume quarter over the 3-year period. The lowest performing quarter was Q1 in 22/23, during which the new MEQ system, processes and structures were introduced (May 2022).

68. For 2023/24, data shows a consistently improved and stable quarterly average KPI performance with the second highest Q1-Q3 volumes across the 3-year period. Although 2022/23 had the highest KPI performance in Q2 at 86% it also had the lowest quarterly volumes.

69. Comparing pre & post IT system implementation performance between Q1-Q3, pre-implementation quarterly volumes were higher with the same KPI performance as 22/23 during which the IT system was implemented & adopted. Although the same quarterly KPI performance average remained the same during 22/23, the volumes were the lowest quarterly average. This indicates challenges as the new IT system embedded during that year as with the lowest quarterly volumes, performance is expected to increase. However, 2023/24 quarterly data shows an improvement which although

second highest in terms of quarterly volume average had the highest (and most stable) KPI performance.

### Next Steps

70. In addition to system improvements and issue resolution detailed above, in 2024/25, restructures will take place across the MEQ satellite support teams sitting in individual departments. This will recentralise all MEQ support officers within the Complaints & Access to Information Service thereby standardising approaches to support and ensuring one point of contact to Members regarding their queries, concerns, and issues. We will also be using data and Insight from Complaints and MEQs and other tools to work with services to prevent issues where possible.

### **Relevance to Council Plans and Strategies**

71. Vital analysis from complaints and MEQ data within the annual report has enabled the Council to present action plans for improvement in areas where residents are not receiving the level of quality service the Council aspires to.

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### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Corporate Complaints Annual Report 2022/23

[Enfield Council Corporate Complaints Annual Report 2022 - 2023](#)

**Departmental reference number, if relevant:** EC0003