

ANNUAL REPORT COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

1st APRIL 2019 - 31st MARCH 2020



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I. INTRODUCTION

Rotherham Council is committed to being open and accountable. It listens to the views of residents and communities and places them at the heart of the way that services are provided. Therefore, both customer feedback through formal complaints and the way that the Council responds to this feedback are vital indicators of the overall performance of the organisation.

The Council always aims to maintain a high level of performance and improve the quality of service offered to residents. This includes providing high quality, timely responses to formal complaints, and continuing to learn and improve, based on the feedback received. Performance improved again in 2019/20, with 89% of complaints being resolved within relevant timescales, which was the strongest performance of the past five years and exceeded the five year Council average of 83%.

All Councils need to provide complaint procedures to respond to customer concerns in an open and transparent way within defined timescales. The purpose of this report is to outline the complaints and compliments that the Council received during 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, highlighting key themes and trends. The report also explains how the Council has performed against the required standards and, crucially, includes case studies demonstrating how services have learnt from complaints received. This is arguably the most important aspect of the complaints process.

Feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board continues to be considered as part of these reports. The report has been produced and published later than usual due to the global pandemic affecting normal delivery of service in year 2020/21, with the Complaints Team redeployed to assist with the Council's emergency response. It should be noted that because this report considered complaints for the financial year 2019/20 ending in March 2020 the effect of the pandemic on complaints and on the delivery of Council services was marginal and the majority of the impact was in the final month of the year. Next year's complaint report will fully reflect the impact of the pandemic.

Although customer feedback provides a valuable insight into how the Council is performing, complaints and compliments figures do not reflect the full picture. This report should, therefore, be understood within the context of the number of customers interacting with each service and key developments that occurred within 2019/20.

Furthermore, building on the key developments in 2019/20, priority areas of focus for next year will include:

- Revised approach to learning from complaints. Creating a learning from complaints programme, so that all learning reported is considered and the impact of service improvement is understood and recorded
- Continue to improve performance to timescale. Making sure that we do not break our promise to customers and responses are timely and effective
- Make the complaint procedures more outcome focussed. Resolving the complaint and finding solutions should be at the centre of all investigations
- Improve efforts to increase the number of compliments recorded. The Complaints Team will promote the procedure for recording compliments and support directorates to ensure that more of the compliments received are properly recorded and reported.

2. KEY HEADLINES – 2019/20

1,372
complaints
received

More complaints were received.
(1,372 in 2019/20 compared with 1,275 in 2018/19, which is an increase of 7%)

Fewer compliments were received.
(794 in 2019/20 compared with 844 in 2018/19, which is a decrease of 6%)



More complaints were upheld; at 365 or 27%.
(305 or 25% upheld 2018/19)

More complaints were responded to within timescales.
(89% in 2019/20 compared with 87% in 2018/19)



Seven complaints were investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
(14 in 2018/19 in comparison)

Fewer complaints around quality of service.
(632 compared to 711 in 2018/19, a decrease of 11%)



More complaints regarding actions of staff.
(199 compared to 168 in 2018/19, an increase of 18%)

More complaints relating to Finance and Customer Services and Housing Services Directorates.



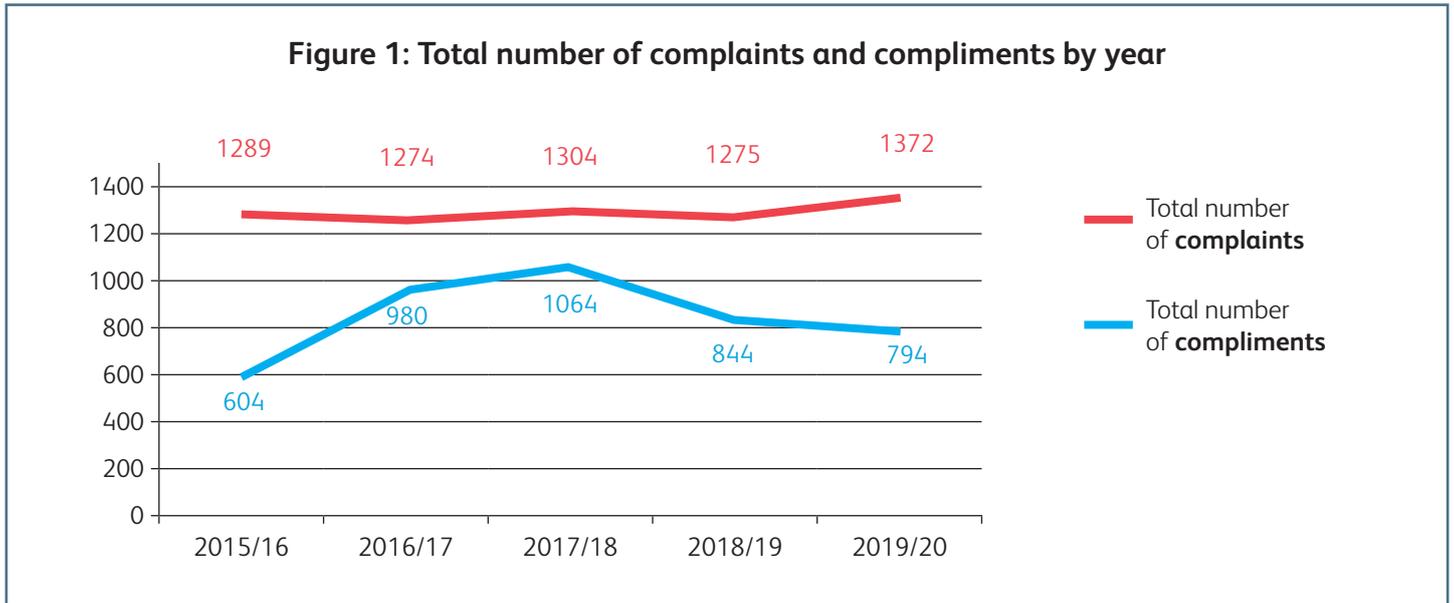
Fewer complaints relating to Adult Social Care, Children's and Young People's and Regeneration and Environment Services.

Fewer escalations through the complaint procedure.
(35 or 3% compared to 55 or 4% in 2018/19)



3. OVERVIEW

3.1 Summary



In 2019/20, the overall number of complaints received by the Council increased by 7%, going from 1,275 in 2018/19 to 1,372. This increase is the highest number in five years, an increase of 97 complaints following a small decrease the previous year.

The Council provides a wide variety of services to over 263,400 residents. In this context, 1,372 complaints are only a fraction of the number of customer interactions occurring each year (see Appendix Two which provides an indication of the number of customer contacts received through the Council’s customer service centres).

The number of compliments recorded by the Council decreased, from 844 in 2018/19 to 794 (a decrease of 6%). It is not considered that the decrease in numbers received is indicative of a reduction in customer satisfaction in Council services, rather it is evidence of a lack of engagement of staff in the process of recording the compliments they receive. It may be that, although compliments continue to be received, they are not being passed on to be recorded. In response, staff will be reminded of the process to make sure that as many compliments are recorded as possible.

It is recognised that both compliments and complaints procedures need to be easy and accessible for customers to allow them to provide valuable feedback.

The Council departments that saw an increase in complaints from the previous year, and were responsible for the increase overall, were Housing, Finance and Customer Services and Public Health. Housing increased by 26%, 439 to 551, Finance and Customer Services increased by 41%, 129 to 182 and Public Health, 1 to 4.

The departments that saw a decrease in the number of complaints received were Children and Young People’s Services, who saw the biggest decrease, from 200 to 147, 27%, followed by Adult Social Services, from 87 to 72, 17%. Regeneration and Environment Services also decreased, but only from 413 to 411, and Assistant Chief Executive’s also saw a decrease from 6 to 5. It should be noted that the decrease in social care complaints is a continuing trend, in 2017/18 Children and Young People’s Services received 258 complaints. Adult Social Services received 101 in 2017/18 and 115 in 2016/17.

The following diagrams show the breakdown of complaints and compliments by Directorate in 2018/19 and 2019/20.

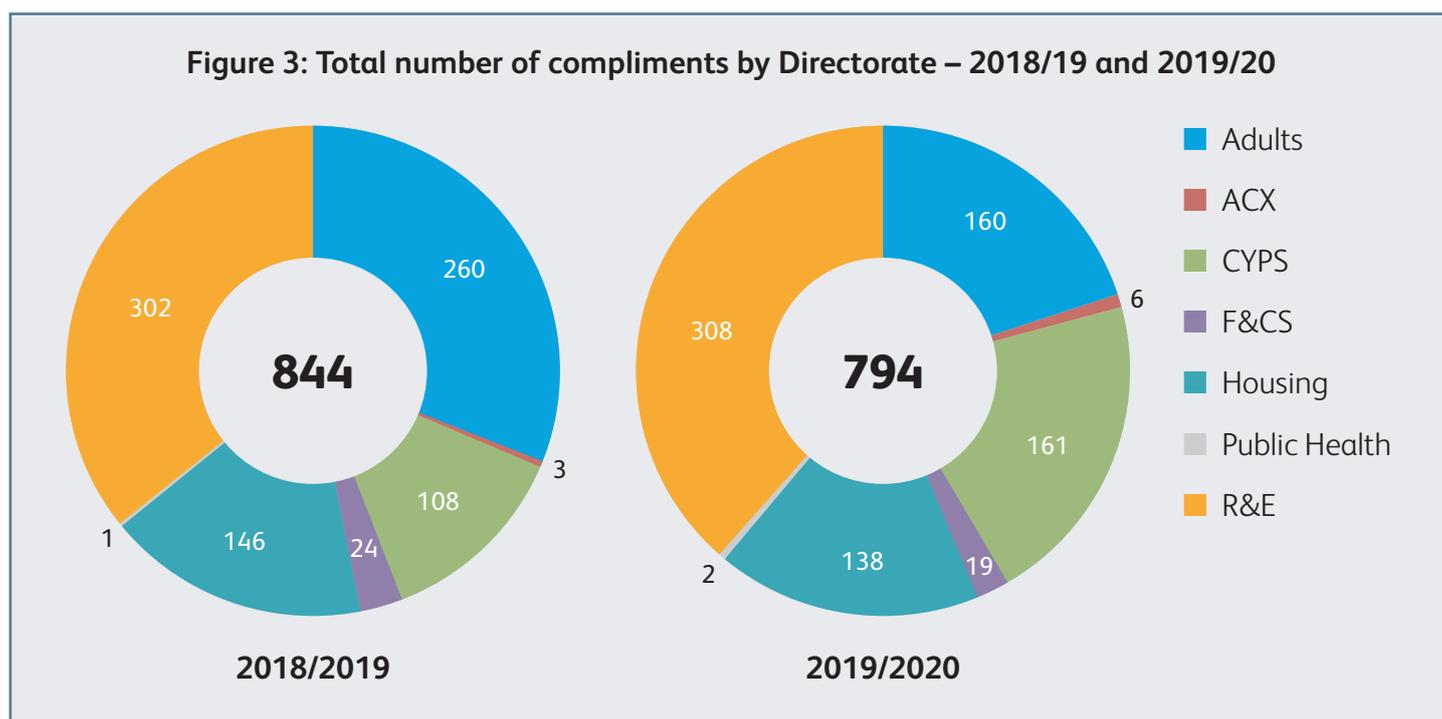
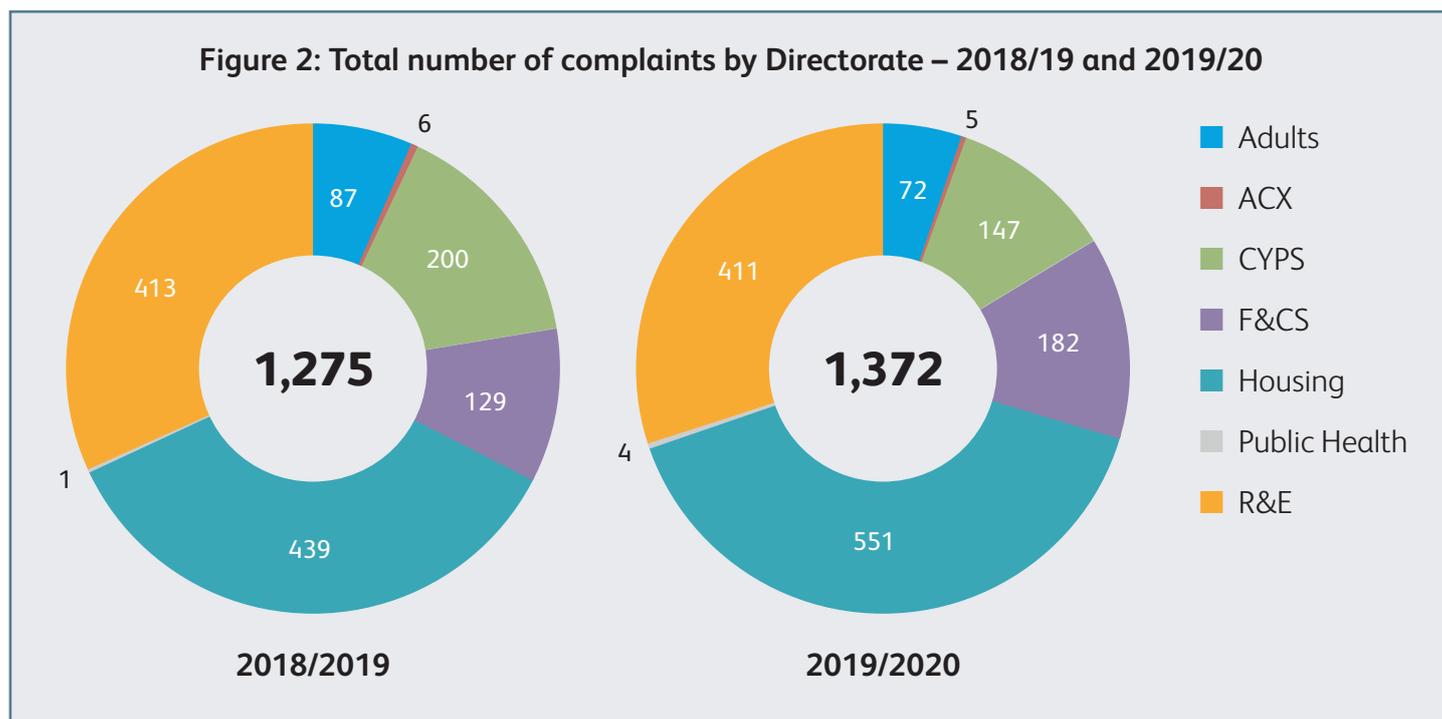
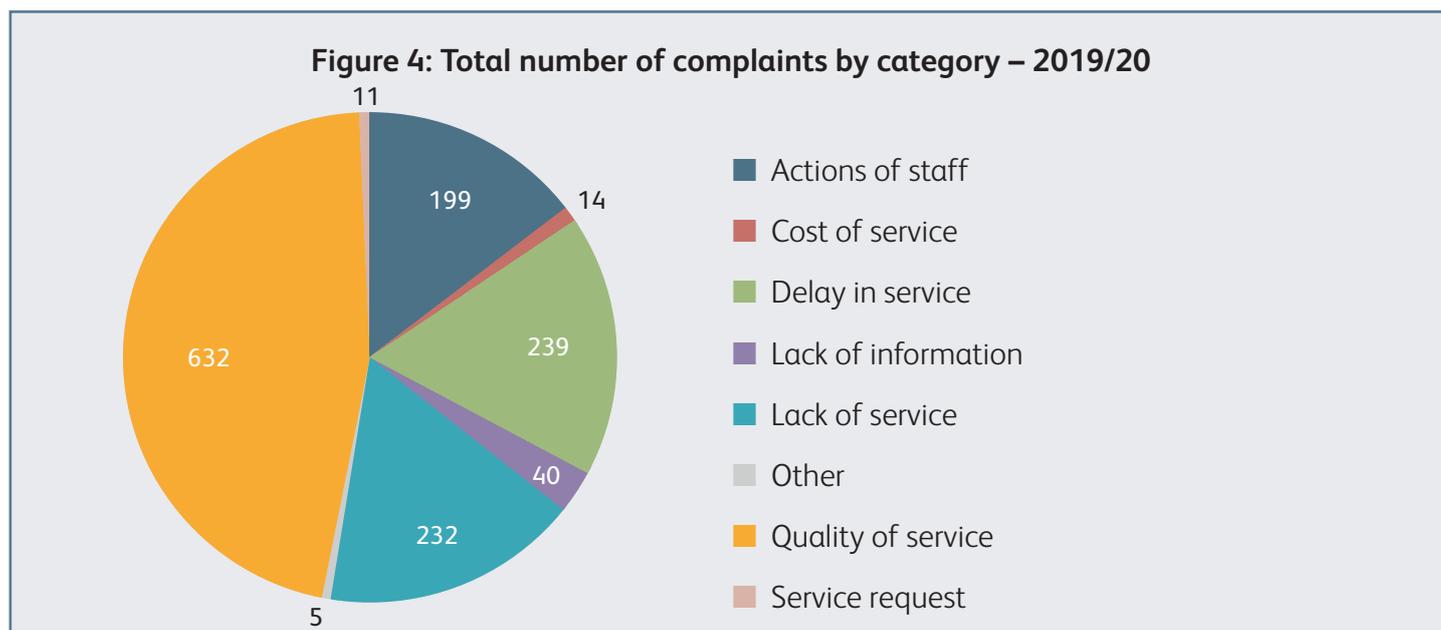


Figure 2 demonstrates that the two highest areas for complaints were Housing and Regeneration and Environment Services. This is consistent with previous years' figures, as these areas typically receive the highest volume of complaints. They deal with largest number of customers and are responsible for a high number of service transactions over the year. Please see Appendix Two for an indication of the volume of yearly transactions, in which a large proportion relate to these areas.

The number of complaints received tends to correlate to the number of customers that are served by the directorate. Therefore, a directorate receiving a higher volume of complaints is not necessarily reflective of poor performance and should be understood within the context of services provided.

As part of the process of monitoring and handling customer feedback, the Complaints Team is responsible for categorising complaints based on the subject matter. The following diagram outlines the categories of complaints received in 2019/20:



Approximately 46 % of all complaints were categorised as quality of service. Complaints within this category have decreased from 711 in 2018/19 to 632 in 2019/20 (a decrease of 11 %).

Delay in service also accounted for the second highest category of complaints, with 239 complaints (or 17 %) falling into this category. Although the numbers of complaints in categories quality of service and actions of staff were significant across all directorates, the majority of the complaints categorised as delay in service were again within Housing Services, with 133 of the 239 complaints in this category (see section 7).

In addition to reporting against general subject areas there is a need to report complaints in more detail to directorate and service management teams. To assist with this level of reporting additional complaint classifications were developed, reviewed at year end, and updated. These are service specific and more accurately reflect the types of complaints received. Examples of the most common complaint types recorded by this classification are as follows:

- Garage repair issue
- Damp issues in council properties
- Call Waiting Times
- Rent Arrears
- Repair quality
- Missed repair appointment
- ASB Management
- Brown bin
- Repair delay
- Missed/non-collection of wheeled bins.

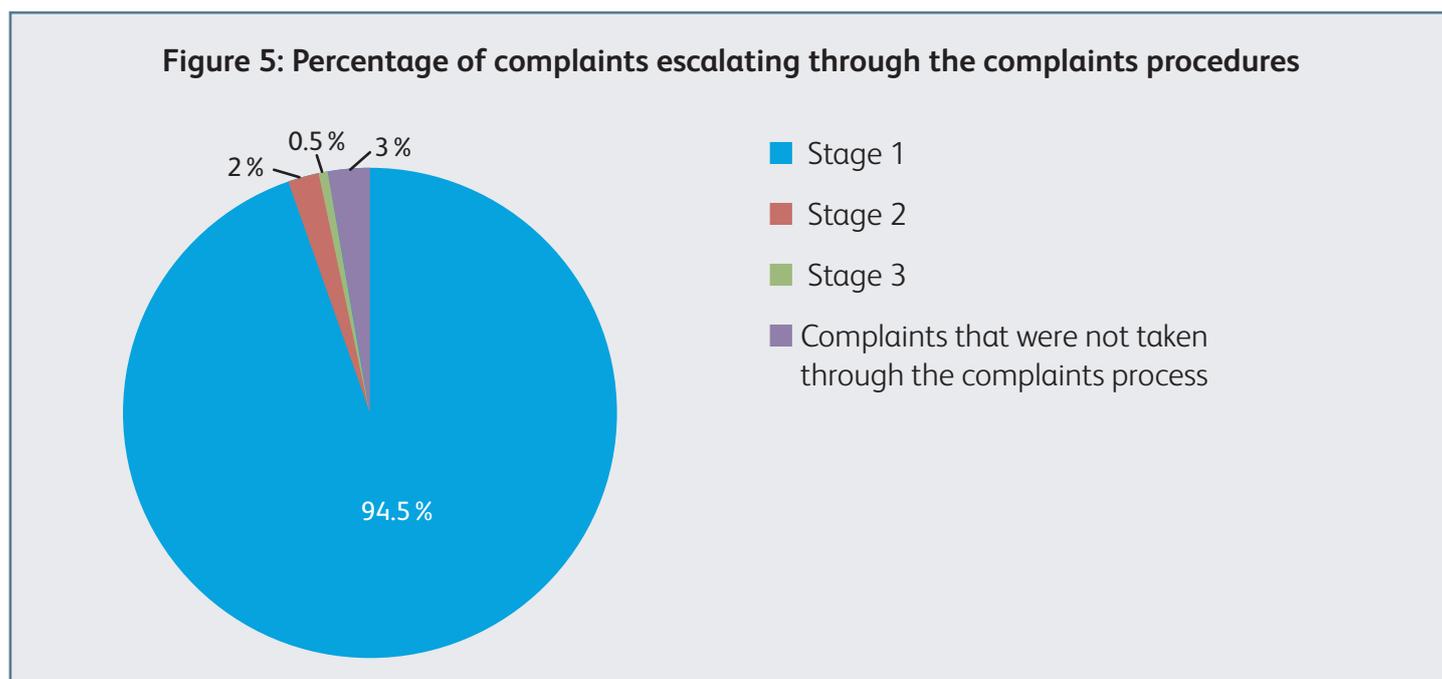
For further detail around directorate complaint trends please see sections 5 to 11 of the report.

It should also be noted that slightly more complaints were upheld, this is where we have investigated and found a problem with the service we have provided, 365 or 27 % (305 or 25 % upheld 2018/19) of all complaints. Again, please see sections 5 to 11 for more detail of upheld complaints by directorate and how we have learnt from upheld complaints.

3.2 Dealing with Complaints

The Council follows four different complaints procedures: housing, children's social care, adult social care, and the corporate complaints procedure. The social care complaints procedures are legislative and have individual statutory requirements about how complaints are dealt with.

A relatively small portion of complaints are not taken through the formal complaint's procedure (referred to as informal complaints). These are complaints that are in relation to council policy or decisions that have been formally approved in Cabinet. In these cases, the complaint is not taken through the formal procedure as it cannot be upheld, however all complainants receive a formal (written) response. This report includes these complaints in the overall total figures. In 2019/20, this amounted to only 40 (3%) out of a total of 1,372 complaints.

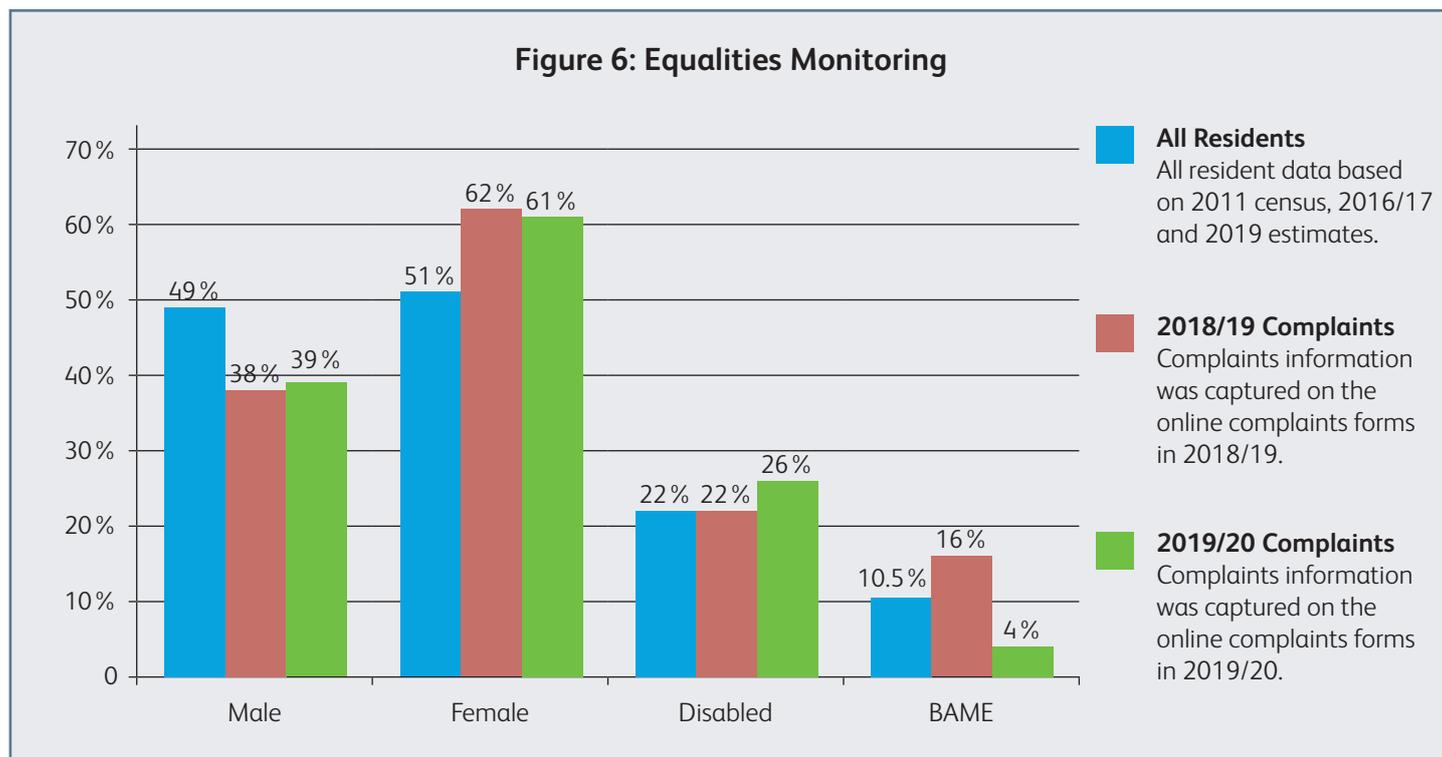


The diagram above outlines the number of complaints that reached the various stages of the complaint's procedures.

The extent to which complaints escalate through the complaint's procedure is an important measure, as it is preferable to find resolutions for customers at the earliest possible stage. As shown in figure 5, the majority of complaints (94.5%) were resolved at stage 1 (only 31 were escalated to stage 2, compared with 44 in 2018/19).

3.3 Equalities Monitoring

Following the Council’s Equalities and Diversity Peer Review in October 2017, it was agreed to start recording the demographics of customers making formal complaints. This information will be used to ensure that the complaints process is fair and accessible for all customers.



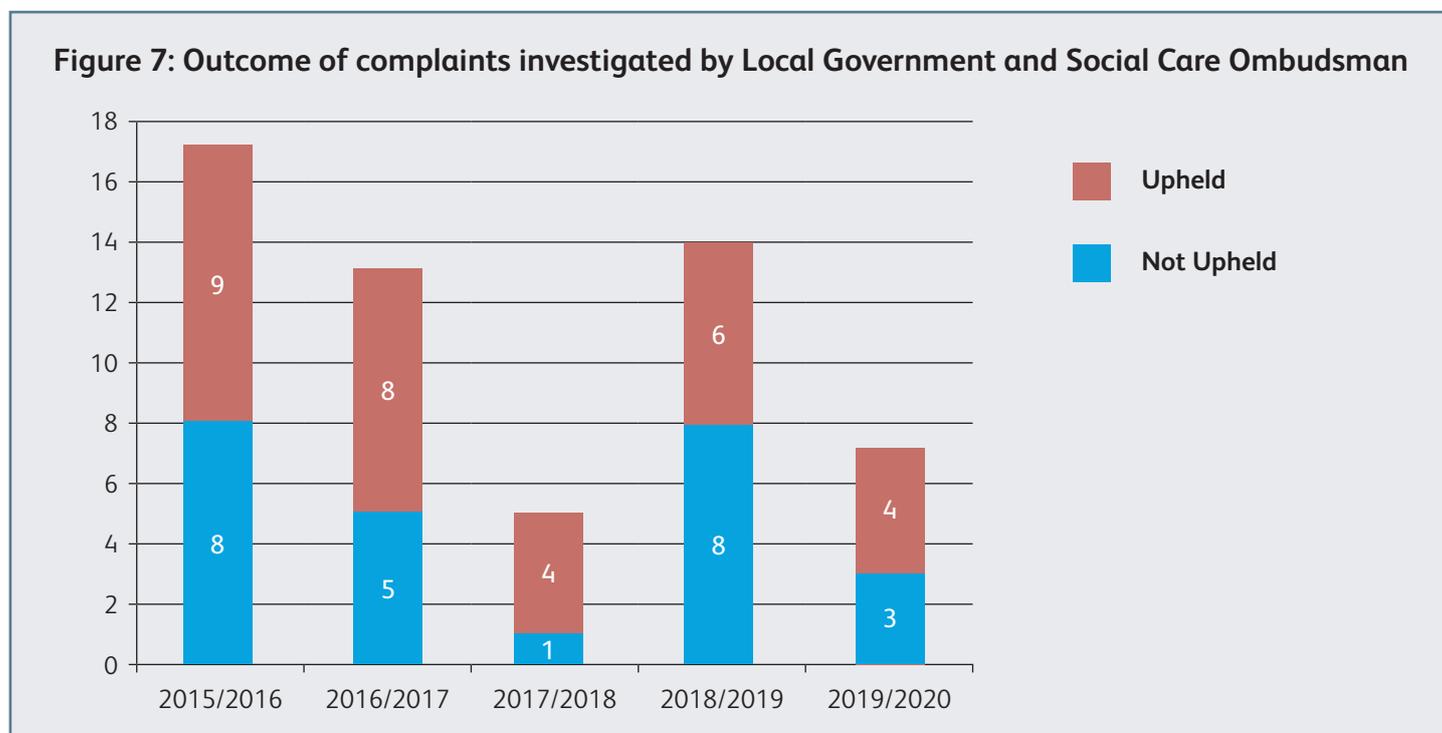
The information received indicates that more female customers complained about Council services in 2019/20. All directorates apart from Adult Social Services recorded a higher number of female complainants. For example, in Housing Services the percentage of female complainants was 71 % and Children’s and Young People’s Services it was 75 %.

It is also noted that numbers have increased for those customers who are disabled, and it is slightly above the average for all residents. In addition, the number of BAME customers who have made a complaint has decreased and it is lower than the average all residents figure.

The Complaints Team will continue to develop and monitor the information in 2020/21 with a view to providing more detailed analysis in respect of complaint trends and report them to monthly and quarterly management meetings.

3.4 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

If complainants are not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint as investigated through the Council's complaints procedures, they can involve the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). 72 complaints and enquiries were directed to the LGSCO in 2019/20, and of these, the LGSCO investigated 7. Figure 7 (see below) provides some context; on average, approximately 11 complaints were investigated by the LGSCO per year between the financial years of 2015/16 and 2019/20.



In 2019/20 less complaints were investigated and less complaints were upheld by the LGSCO than in the previous year. This is less than the five-year average of 11 and is the lowest since 2017/18. It is positive that the number investigated and upheld has reduced, as this would indicate a successful complaint resolution by the Council overall and that the majority of complaints are responded to through the complaint stages.

Appendix One outlines the LGSCO decisions for the Council for 2019/20 and how these compare with 16 statistical neighbour councils. In 2019/20, the Council had the joint lowest number of complaint investigations compared to its statistical neighbours, 16 other local authorities. In addition, its upheld rate at 57%, based on the total investigated, was below the average of 67% for similar local authorities.

Furthermore, it shows that the majority of complaints that were brought to the LGSCO (66 considered) were deemed invalid or incomplete, referred back for local resolution or closed after initial enquiries. This along with the relatively low number of investigations reflects positively that the Council's complaints procedures are working effectively to find fair and appropriate local resolutions.

Of the four complaints that were investigated and upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, three were in Children and Young People's Services, and one was in Regeneration and Environment.

3.5 Housing Ombudsman

From April 2013, the Housing Ombudsman has dealt with all complaints from tenants regarding social housing. There were two decisions made by the Housing Ombudsman in 2019/20, one was upheld and one was upheld in part.

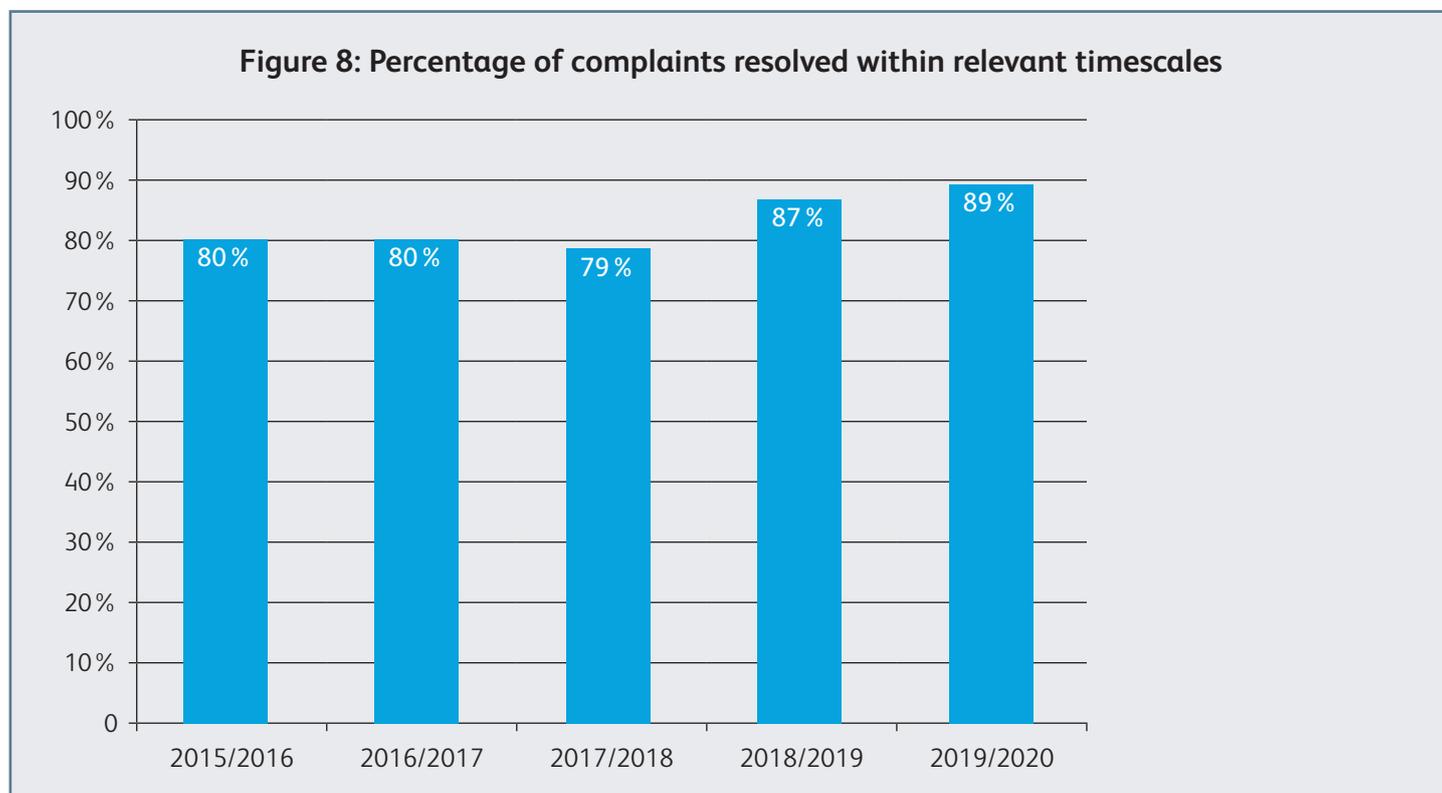
The upheld complaint was regarding the timeliness of repairs to a council property, the Council was asked to apologise and pay £150 in compensation.

4. PERFORMANCE

4.1 Performance Overview

Performance is monitored through regular (weekly, monthly, and quarterly) performance reports presented to Directorate Leadership Team meetings and Service Management Team meetings.

The following graph compares the overall Council performance against timescales for the past five years:



Performance again increased at 89% of complaint responses within target timescale. This is the best performance in the last five years (87% were responded to within timescales in 2018/19). There has been a continued effort made across all Council services to improve performance to timescales, and the improvements in children's safeguarding and waste management have been maintained.

4.2 How we are improving

Improving the way that complaints are dealt with requires a whole council approach, with services prioritising complaints and making improvements based on the feedback from customers. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every service to make responding to complaints and learning from customer feedback a priority.

A number of service improvements have been made over the year based on feedback from our customers. Key themes of service improvements have included the training and performance management of staff; reviews of processes and policies; and the revision of communication materials. Examples of case studies where service improvements have been made based on complaints are outlined within each Directorate section.

Further work will be undertaken in 2020/21 to continue to improve the approach to dealing with complaints. This is outlined in the 'Next Steps, 2020/21' section at the end of this report.

5. ADULT SERVICES

Figure 9: Total number of complaints and compliments relating to Adult Social Care

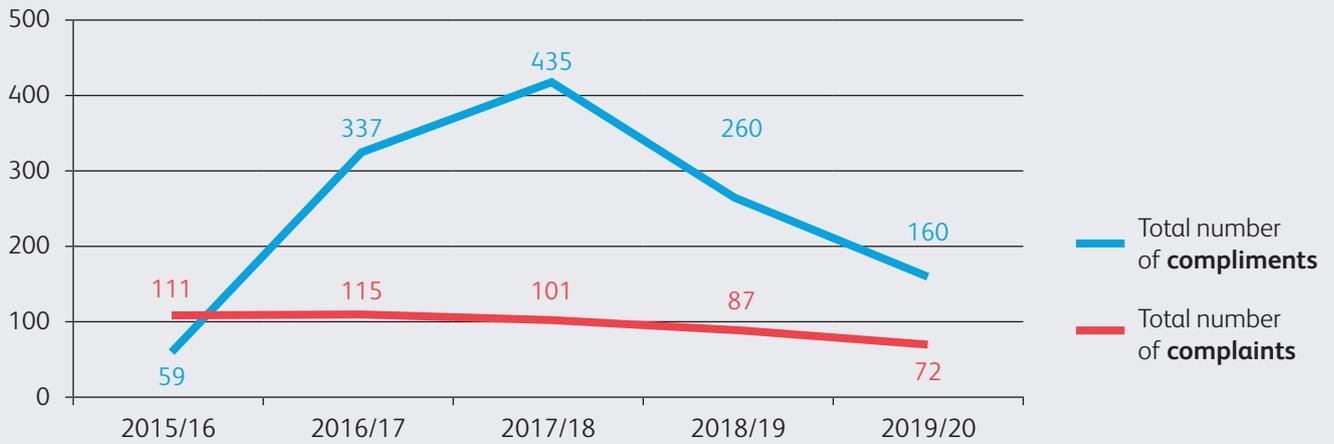


Figure 10: Percentage of complaints about Adult Care Services closed in timescales

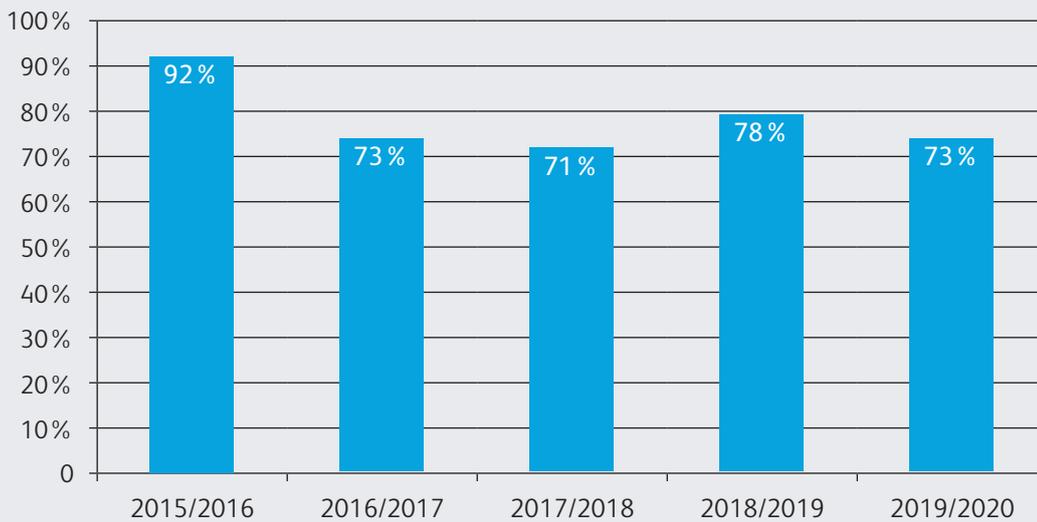
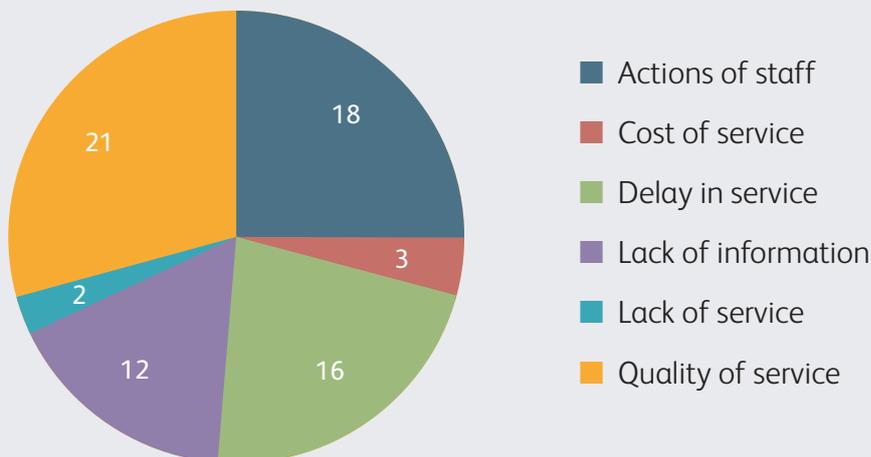


Figure 11: Complaints about Adult Services by category – 2019/20



5.1 Key Headlines

17%

fewer
complaints
received

**Fewer complaints
about Adult Services
were received.**

(72 in 2019/20
compared with
87 in 2018/19)

**Fewer compliments
were received about
Adult Services.**

(160 in 2019/20
compared with
260 in 2018/19)

38%

fewer
compliments
received



**More complaints
were upheld.**

(15 in 2019/20
compared with
14 in 2018/19)

**73% of complaints
were responded to
within timescales.**

This is below the council's
five year average of
83 % and less than
2018/19, 78 %.



**One Ombudsman
complaint decision
was received.**

It was not upheld.

**21 of 72 complaints
were regarding quality
of service and 18 were
regarding actions of
staff.**



Prevalent themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for Adult Services complaints were:

- Disagreements over the outcome of an assessment / review
- Poor communication
- Outcome of safeguarding investigations / the way that they were conducted
- Delays in the assessment / review process.

In addition, the small reduction in complaints can be attributed to continued improvements in the way in which low level concerns can be raised and quickly resolved through the department's Access service. It is also noted that complaints around charging and the cost of services reduced (16 in 18/19 to 3 in 19/20).

Examples of some of the compliments received for Adult Services in 2019/20:

"The member of staff was polite, professional, effective & extremely efficient in dealing my enquiry"

"The member of staff has shown passion and a deep commitment to her job and I would like it known that we all appreciate her effort and dedication."

"All the staff were really nice, made me feel welcome and made my experience there amazing."

"I would like to express my gratitude for the efficient and kind way in which staff assisted me."

5.2 Lessons Learned

Adult Services made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2019/20. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

Customers raised concerns about a consultation exercise in respect of Non-Residential Charging Policy. They were unhappy that more could have been done to promote the exercise and more could be done to support residents to help them to respond to the exercise.

What did we do?

A response was provided directly to the customers who made the complaint to address the issues that they had raised. From considering their complaint we were able to identify improvements for future exercises, such as.

- Making sure easy read information available from the start
- Holding consultation meetings throughout Rotherham
- Holding consultation meetings throughout the time period of the consultation
- Informing and holding information meetings early in the process with organisations so they are better placed in supporting Rotherham residents.

Who is better off?

Improvements to the way the Council engages with affected residents through consultation exercises will benefit all current and future users of Adult Social Services in Rotherham. Through better more meaningful consultation, obtaining the views of the right people at the right time, the Council is able to make sure services meet the specific needs of residents in Rotherham.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

Figure 12: Total number of complaints and compliments about Children and Young People's Services

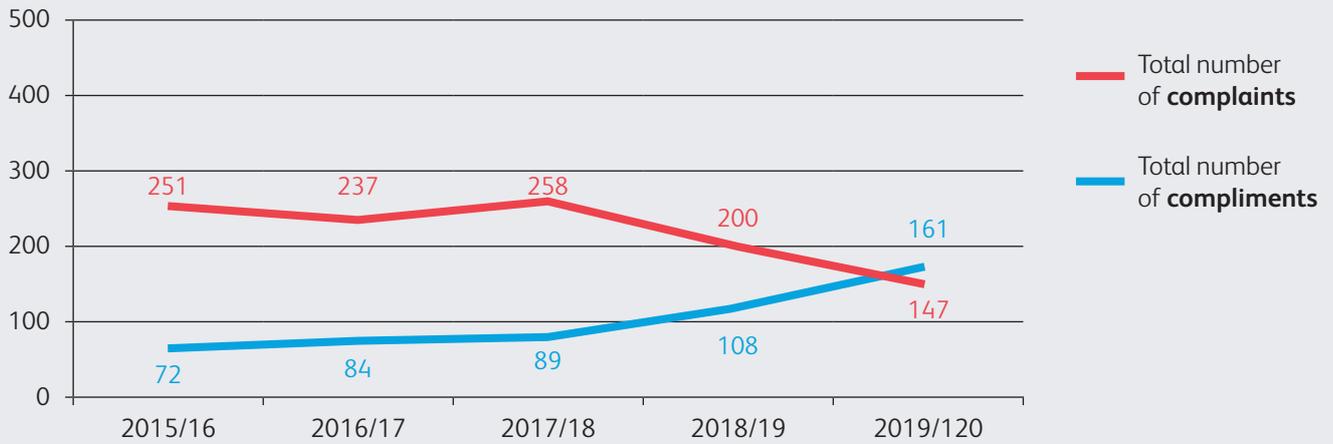


Figure 13: Percentage of complaints about Children and Young People's Services closed within timescales

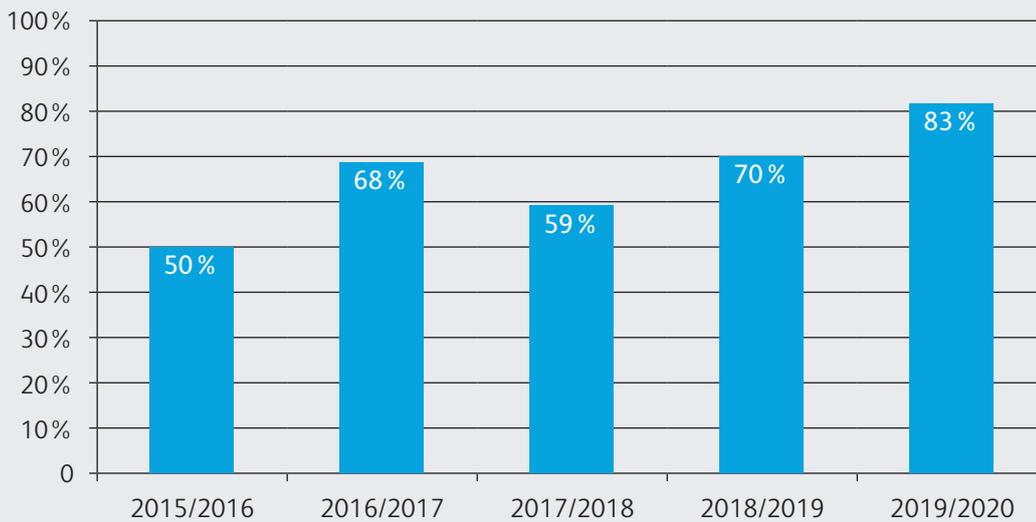
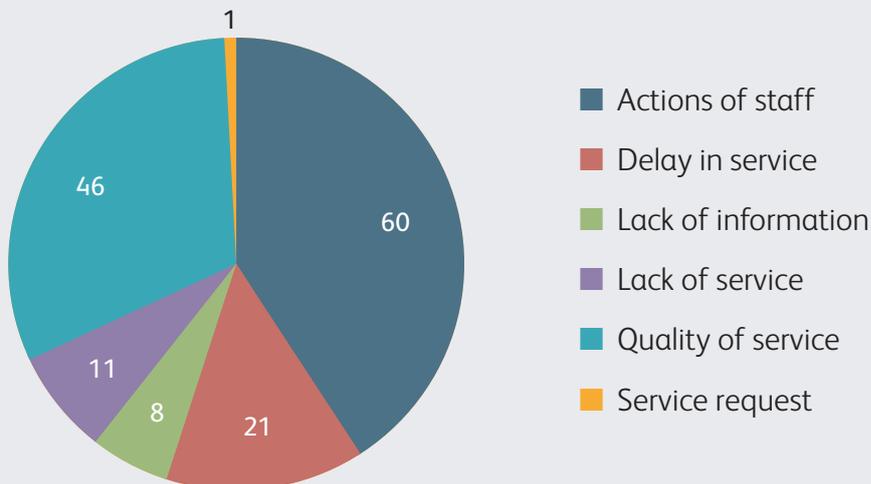


Figure 14: Complaints about Children and Young People's Services by category – 2019/20



6.1 Key Headlines

27%

fewer
complaints
received

Fewer complaints about Children and Young People's Services were received.

(147 in 2019/20 compared with 200 in 2018/19)

More compliments were received about Children's and Young People's Services.

(161 in 2019/20 compared with 108 in 2018/19)

49%

more
compliments
received



More complaints were upheld.

(25 in 2019/20 compared with 23 in 2018/19)

83% of complaints were responded to within timescales.

This is a significant increase on 70% in 2018/19 and is best ever performance.



Five Ombudsman complaint decisions were received.

Three were upheld and two were not upheld.

Most complaints were regarding actions of staff, 60 of 147.

Followed by quality of service, 46 of 147.



Prevalent themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for Children and Young People's Services complaints were:

- Disagreements with decisions made and the outcome of assessment
- Delays in preparing reports or assessments
- Delays/difficulties with communication.

In addition, the reduction in complaints can be attributed to the way in which managers have been encouraged and supported to address concerns at the earliest opportunity, so that any problems can be resolved before they enter into the formal complaint procedure.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Children & Young People's Services in 2019/20:

"Big thank you for all she has done and the support. The boys couldn't be happier and has made a massive difference to their lives"

"She is open and honest and without her things would be different, my children might have been removed from my care. She challenges me respectfully and listens. I did not think we needed CYPs involvement, but the worker has made a positive impact on me and my family."

"Well what can I say, doing this 10-week parenting course has not only helped and opened my eyes, but also gave me a new perspective on parenting. It's not a stiff, boring, dreary classroom environment, it is full of fun and if you're willing to open up to change, it's going to be life changing for your family life. Can't thank you enough for the support"

6.2 Lessons Learned

Children and Young People's Services made several service improvements in 2019/20 following the feedback from customers. An example of this is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

A complaint was investigated by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman about the support provided to grandparents when they cared for his grandson following his birth. Children's social care would not ordinarily be involved in such a case but there was a complex background to this case. The Council did not correctly establish the couple as friends and family foster carers which led to a loss of financial support during this period.

What did we do?

As well as providing the appropriate financial support to the couple concerned, a review of the current policy was undertaken to make it clearer for both employees and carers when support would be offered and how this would be paid. The service also carried out dip sampling, offered lunchtime briefings as well as staff meetings to aid learning and development. The Fostering Service are now more proactive and visiting teams (virtually) on a regular cycle to offer advice/support and to keep open communication so that the subject remains live and in the fore of our thinking. Children & Young People's Services are now confident that social workers are clear on the processes to follow should this fall into a Regulation 24 placement.

Who is better off?

Carers are receiving more information and advice as well as financial support. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman was satisfied with the Council's actions following their recommendations and received assurances that the risks of recurrence were minimised.

7. HOUSING SERVICES

Figure 15: Total number of complaints and compliments about Housing Services

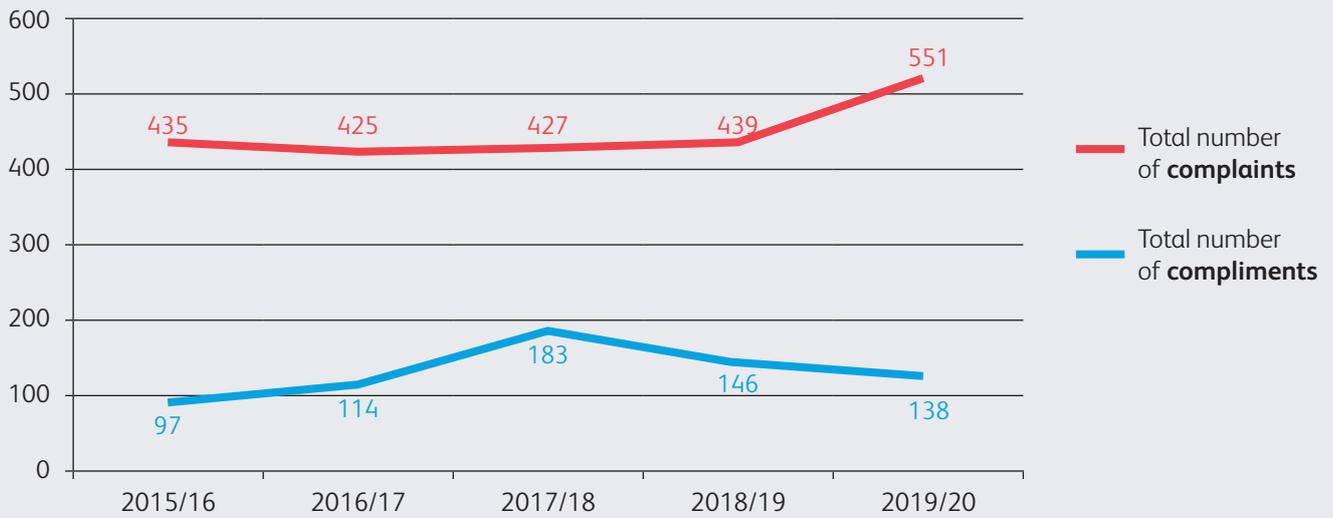


Figure 16: Percentage of complaints about Housing Services closed within timescales

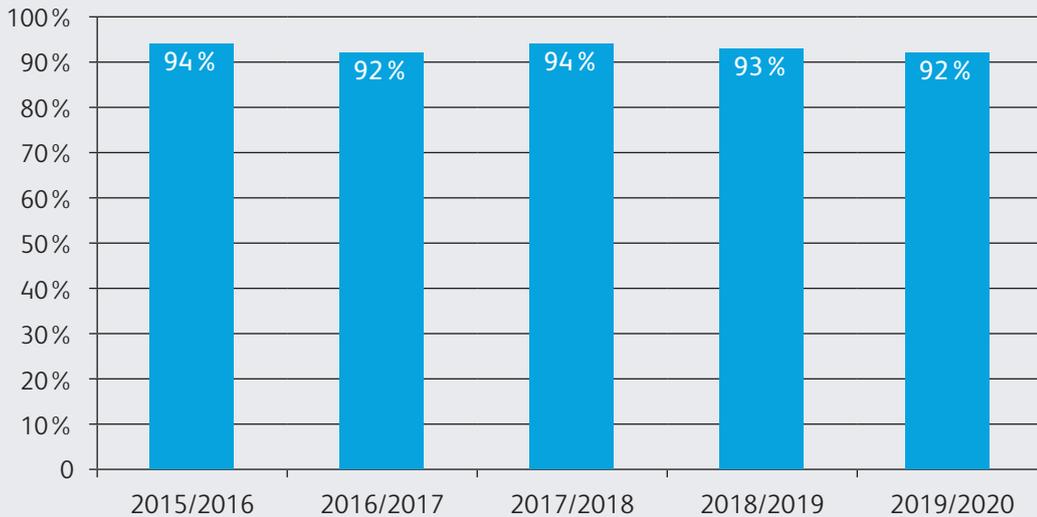
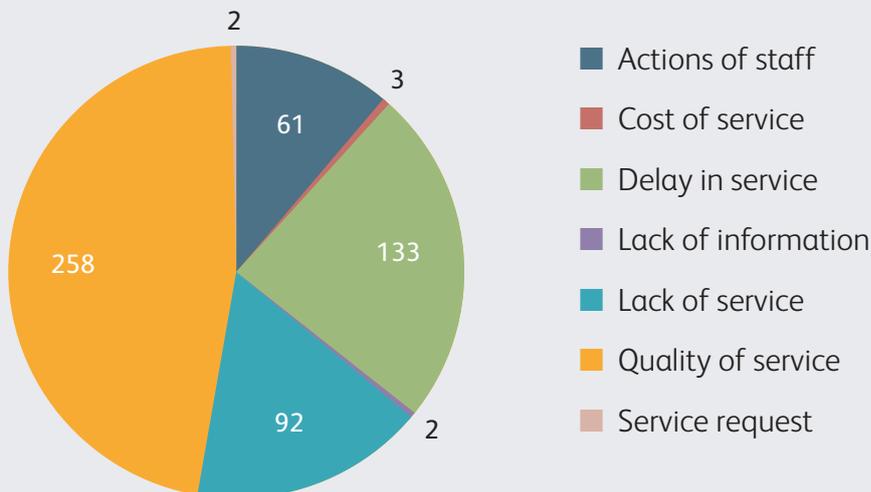


Figure 17: Complaints about Housing Services by category – 2019/20



7.1 Key Headlines

26%

more
complaints
received

More complaints about Housing Services were received.
(551 in 2019/20 compared with 439 in 2018/19)

Fewer compliments were received about Housing Services.
(138 in 2019/20 compared with 146 in 2018/19)

5%

fewer
compliments
received



More complaints were upheld.
(169 in 2019/20 compared with 129 in 2018/19)

92% of complaints were responded to within timescales.

This is significantly above the five year council average of 83% but is slightly lower than 2018/19, 93%.



Two Ombudsman complaint decisions were received. **One was upheld and one was partially upheld.**

Almost half of complaints were regarding quality of service.

258 of 551 complaints. 133 complaints were regarding delay in service.



Prevalent themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for Housing Services complaints were:

- Issues relating to repairs: specifically, regarding repeated repairs and the quality of workmanship
- Delays in service, most specifically concerning repair delays and missed appointments
- Rent arrears and how correspondence is perceived as 'intimidating,' and issues regarding the set-up of Direct Debits
- There is a common theme of managing customer expectations via communication and correspondence.

In addition, the increase in complaints can be attributed to four main complaint types, repair delays, missed appointments, roof leak/gutter and damp issues. These issues are all connected to the amount of rain and bad weather experienced in at the end of 2019 and at the start of 2020. Having to respond to emergency repairs and not being able to complete external repairs impacted on the repairs service overall, resulting in complaints about delays and missed appointments and not just those directly connected to the high rainfall or strong winds.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Housing Services in 2019/20:

”Outstanding piece of work, insightful, proactive and incredibly resourceful. Thank you for going the extra mile - well done and thank you”

“Always gone above and beyond to advise me. A more helpful, caring, respectful professional housing officer would be impossible to find”

“Everyone you’ve dealt with on my patch can’t stop singing your praises. Whatever you are doing you are doing it really well”

7.2 Lessons Learned

Housing Services made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2019/20. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

A next of kin received rent demands two and a half weeks after the death of her mother, despite notifying various Council departments of her bereavement the day after her mother died. After phoning Income Revenue to make a complaint the daughter was informed that the system automatically generates late rent demand letters. The complainant requested that the software be improved in order to avoid upsetting relatives so close to the time of death and funeral. Furthermore, it was discovered that the termination documents were sent to the wrong email address, incurring a delay.

What did we do?

An apology was given, the termination form was sent to the correct email address and notice to terminate was backdated to the original contact date. At the time of the complaint sensitivity to prevent letters being generated was only added to the account once the termination form had been received. As a result, the sensitivity to prevent letters being generated is now applied immediately following the initial contact.

Who is better off?

All next of kin who are dealing with a bereavement will now avoid receiving rent demand letters at a particularly upsetting time, due to the change in process of applying sensitivity to the process.

Housing Services are also working on the following key service improvements:

- The move to a recorded telephone system in income revenue. This will support staff in their customer handling, and aide evidence in complaint responses
- The Charter for Social Housing Residents Social Housing White Paper was released November 2020, which provides reforms to improve social housing and give residents a greater voice.

8. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SERVICES

Figure 18: Total number of compliments and complaints about Regeneration and Environment Services

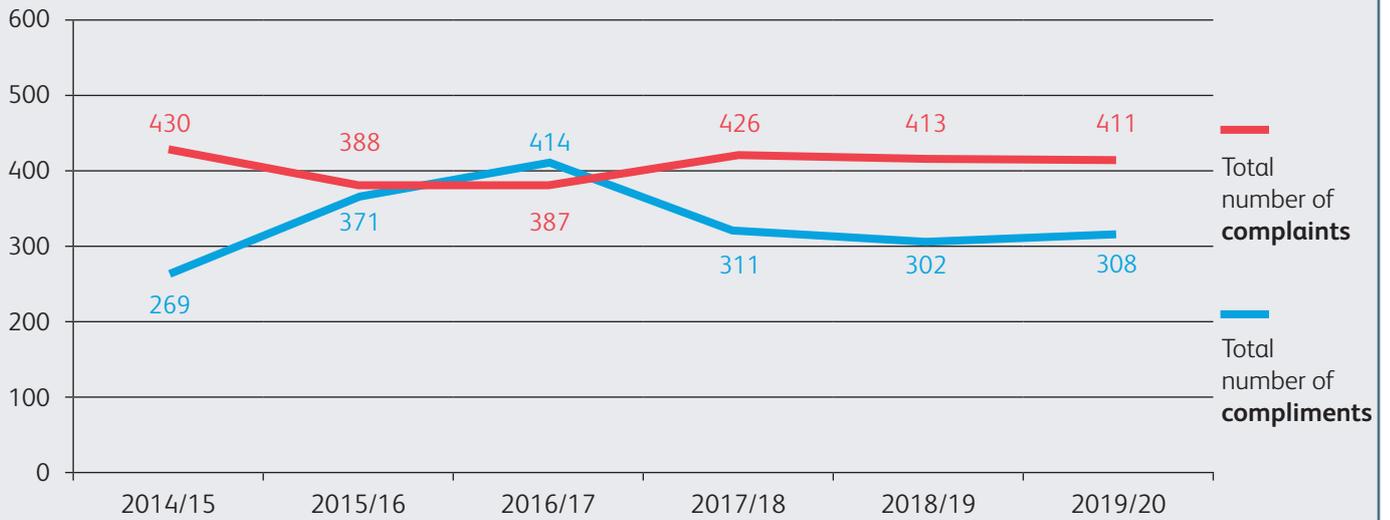


Figure 19: Percentage of complaints about Regeneration and Environment Services closed within timescales

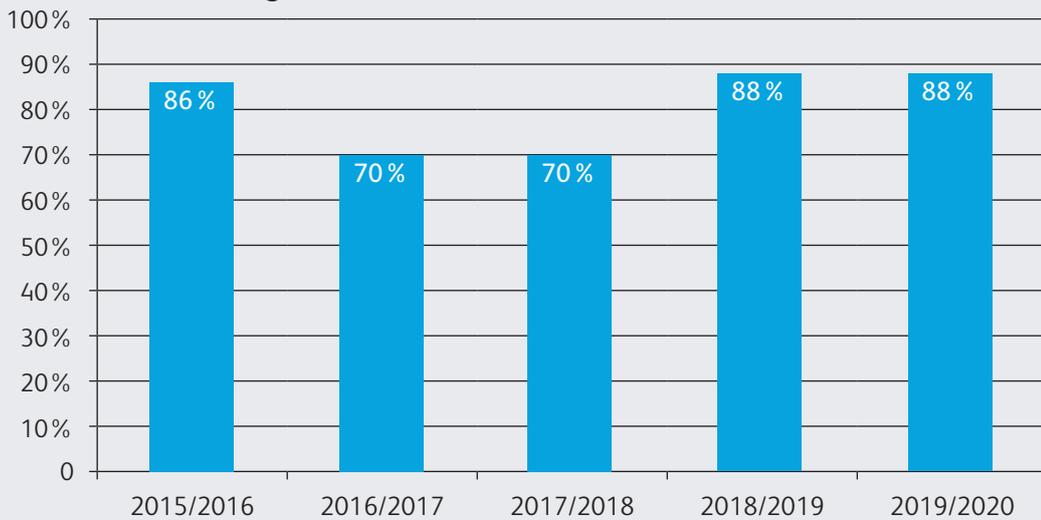
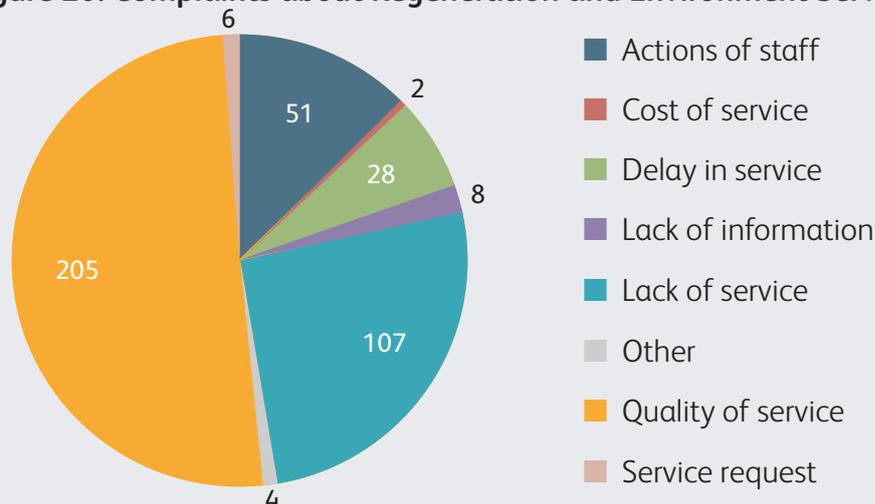


Figure 20: Complaints about Regeneration and Environment Services by category – 2019/20



8.1 Key Headlines

0.5%

fewer
complaints
received

Fewer complaints about Regeneration and Environment Services were received.

(411 in 2019/20 compared with 413 in 2018/19)

More compliments were received about Regeneration and Environment Services.

(308 in 2018/19 compared with 302 in 2018/19)

2%

more
compliments
received



More complaints were upheld.

(122 in 2019/20 compared with 107 in 2018/19)

The same number of complaints responded to within timescales.

(88% in 2019/20 compared with 88% in 2018/19)



One Ombudsman complaint decision was received.

It was part upheld.

Over half of complaints were regarding quality of service. (205 of 411 complaints).

107 complaints were regarding the lack of service.



Prevalent themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for Regeneration and Environment Services were:

- Missed bin collections and complaints about bins not being returned to the correction location as a result of the rollout of introduction of new waste and recycling collections
- Delay in delivery of garden waste bins following subscription.

In addition, the number of complaints remained almost the same as in previous years. The largest number of complaints were regarding domestic waste collections in the Waste Management service, with 198 received. In context, the next highest number of complaints received were in the Libraries and Information Hubs service with 24 received (with the most complaints regarding the facilities in libraries and then information and advice provided).

Examples of some of the compliments received for Regeneration and Environment Services in 2019/20:

“Can I take this opportunity to thank the men collecting the bins last week. I thought I had missed them and bought the bin in, then I saw they were outside. I rushed out but the men had seen what had happened and had collected it from the garden. I really appreciated that.”

“Big thank you from myself and my neighbours for prompt action resulting in homes lower down the street remaining dry ...crews worked constant in horrendous conditions, well-mannered and answered all our questions as well as they could”

“Thank you for very much sweeping the village on Friday and, in particular, the pavement and road between the Church and the village hall. A very thorough job was done which solved the safety problems as well as making it look good. Following the recent heavy rainfall and flooding, you must be a having a very busy time and I am grateful that you were able to help us once again.”

8.2 Lessons Learned

Regeneration and Environment Services made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2019/20. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

Complaints were received regarding the delays in receiving garden waste bins after customers had paid for and subscribed to the service.

What did we do?

The Council arranged prompt delivery where it was identified that garden waste bins had not been delivered as they should have been.

The Council’s Waste Management Service reviewed the process for transferring the details of customers who had subscribed to the Garden Waste Service from the Customer Services to waste management where bin deliveries are arranged. This identified an error which mean that the details of some customers who had subscribed for a second garden waste bin had not been transferred to the service for arrangements to be made for the bin to delivered. The process was revised to ensure that this did not happen again.

Who is better off?

Customers now receive prompt delivery of garden waste bins when they subscribe to the Garden Waste Collection Service and customers who subscribe for a second garden waste bin are processed correctly.

9. FINANCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

NB. The comparison for Finance and Customer Services is based on the previous four financial years only, due to the fact that Customer Services formerly sat within another Directorate.

Figure 21: Total number of complaints and compliments about Finance and Customer Services

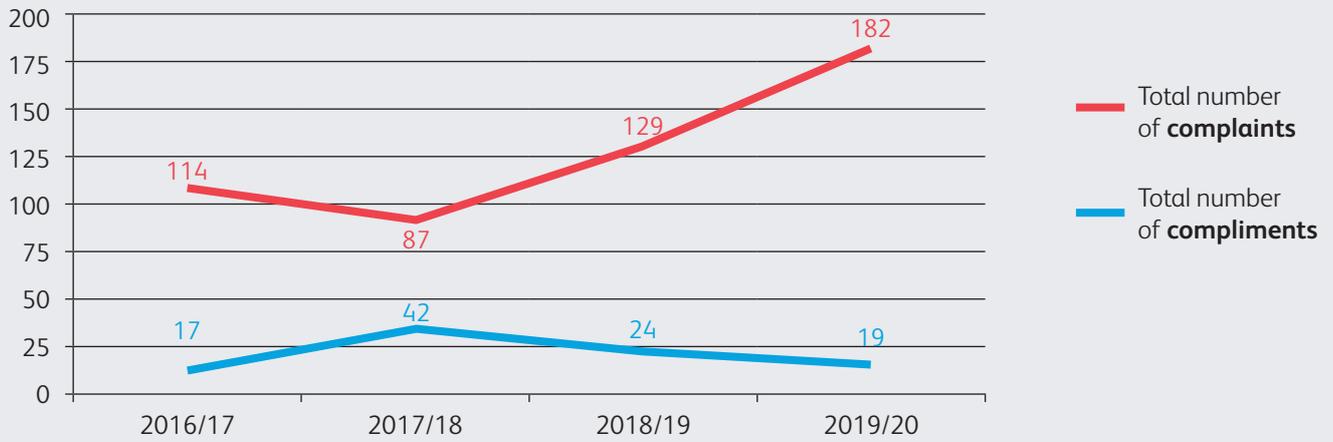


Figure 22: Percentage of complaints about Finance and Customer Services closed within timescales

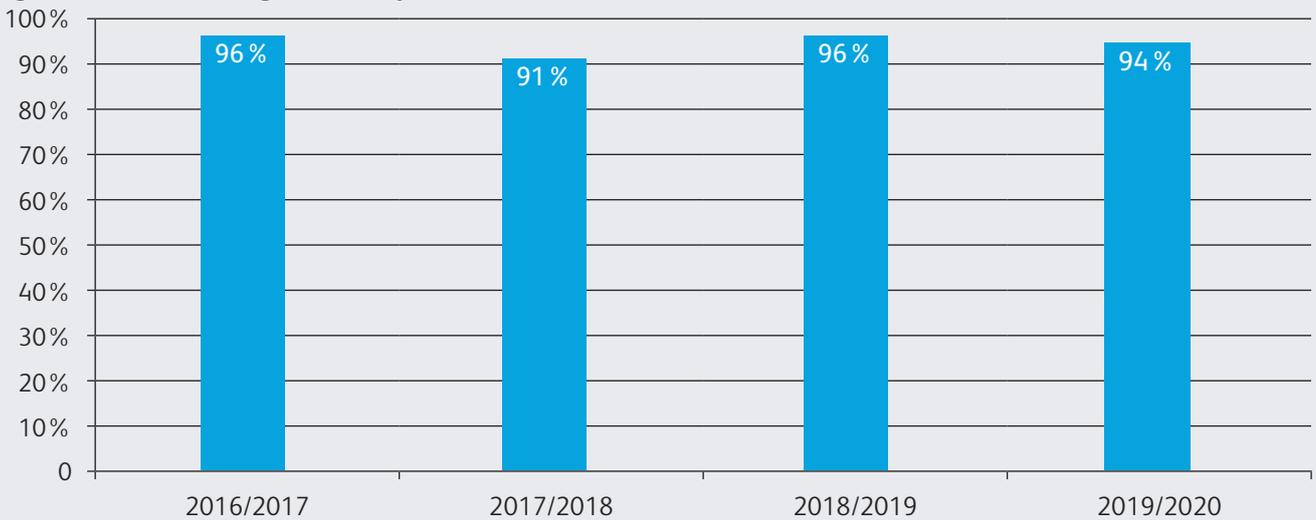
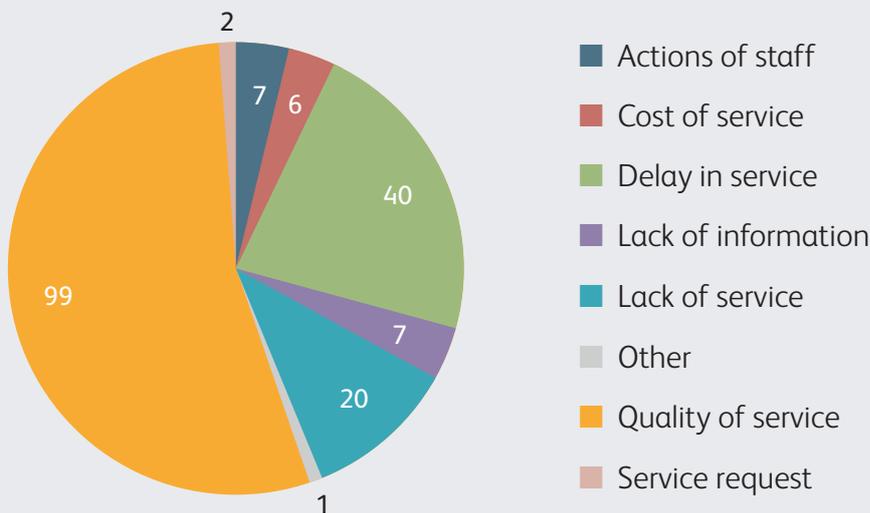


Figure 23: Complaints about Finance and Customer Services by category – 2019/20



9.1 Key Headlines

41%

more
complaints
received

**More complaints
about Finance and
Customer Services
were received.**

(182 in 2019/20
compared with
129 in 2018/19)

**Fewer compliments
were received about
Finance and
Customer Services.**

(19 in 2019/20
compared with
24 in 2018/19)

21%

fewer
compliments
received



**More complaints
were upheld.**

(33 in 2019/20
compared with
32 in 2018/19)

**94% of complaints
were responded to
within timescales.**

This is significantly
above the five year
council average of 83%
but is slightly lower than
2018/19, 96%.



**No Ombudsman
complaint decisions
were received.**

**54% of complaints
were regarding
quality of service.**

(99 of 182 complaints).
40 complaints were
regarding delay)



Prevalent themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for Finance and Customer Services were:

- Call waiting times for Customer Services
- Complaints about applications for Disabled Persons Parking Permits including delays.

In addition, the overall increase in complaints for this directorate can be attributed to complaints in the Customer Services department. As mentioned above these are complaints about the impact of longer waiting times on the telephone and the inconvenience these delays have caused. The other main reason for the increase was due to changes introduced nationally around the application process for Disabled Persons Parking Permits. Customers needed additional support from the council to help with the changes.

It should be noted that this increase had not carried on into the current year 20-21; the number of complaints in Customer Services has reduced significantly. This is due to the introduction of additional staff and learning and service improvement in respect of the Disabled Persons Parking Permit process.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Finance and Customer Services in 2019/20:

“Really helpful, efficient and skilled at teaching a novice how to carry out tasks; so that I’m now able to do it by myself. Wanted to highlight this to you as he is a credit to your Service!”

“We have arranged collection of some bulky items and I want to say what fantastic service we have had from an officer in that department. You have an absolute star there. Her customer service was fantastic. She just wanted to do more to help. I am sick of the constant criticism of our Council and wanted to say that the officer has demonstrated the reason we are proud to live in Rotherham”

“Good job you are all doing, thanks for helping them at this time, he said that Rotherham Council are doing a marvellous job regarding helping flood victims”

9.2 Lessons Learned

Finance and Customer Services made several service improvements in 2019/20 following the feedback from customers. An example of these is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

Complaints were received regarding call waiting times when customers contacted the Council regarding waste and recycling collections.

What did we do?

The Council arranged immediate call-backs for customers who had been unable to contact Customer Services.

The Council has invested in the recruitment of additional Customer Service Advisors including temporary staff to support with enquiries following the roll-out of boroughwide waste and recycling changes.

The Council has undertaken ongoing multi-skilling of staff to enable them to answer calls across all services.

Who is better off?

Customers waiting times have reduced significantly with the introduction of additional Customer Service Advisors. This has led to a significant reduction in complaints received in 2021/20.

10. ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DIRECTORATE

The Directorate is mainly comprised of services internally supporting the Council, the largest service area being Human Resources. The majority of services within the directorate only have limited contact with customers and due to the nature of services they provide they will not generate a lot of complaints or compliments.

As such, information on what was received in 2019/20 is provided in summary below.

10.1 Key Headlines

- Five complaints were received. (6 in 2018/19)
- Six compliments were recorded. (3 in 2018/19)
- Two complaints were taken through the formal complaint's procedure, two Stage One complaints.
- No complaints were upheld. (2 part upheld in 2018/19)
- No complaints were investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- 100% of complaints were resolved within statutory timescales. (40%, 2 out of 5 in 2018/19)

10.2 Complaints

The subject matter of each complaint received is listed below:

Human Resources

- Time taken to get through to the HR Helpdesk on two separate occasions (complaint made by a former member of staff).

Neighbourhoods

- A resident felt that a member of staff had misinterpreted facts about them in an earlier complaint response and wanted them recording correctly.

Democratic Services

- How a Councillor's surgery had been organised and how the council support Councillors.
- Unhappy that they had submitted a petition but had not received a response.
- Unhappy with a school admissions appeal date. That in the circumstances it should be prioritised.

10.3 Compliments

Six received

Neighbourhoods

- “I just wanted to say a personal thank you for everything that you have done and doing for our little group. There is no way without you it would be as successful as it is now”.

Complaints Team

- “I have just phoned to say thank you, the bin has been there for weeks, I only phoned yesterday, and they have taken it today”.
- “Very helpful, had gone outside and above my remit to offer assistance and I was a great ambassador to the Council”.

Human Resources

- “Been fantastic throughout the application process. The best service I have ever received prior to, during and after the interview. Liaising with J has definitely created a positive first impression of Rotherham Council”.

Democratic Services

- “Just wanted to say thank you to you both and everyone else at the Town Hall, the guides in particular were brilliant! Please pass on my thanks to everyone. The format worked really well, the food was lovely, and the room looked great, so brilliant team effort!”
- “I’m sure everyone enjoyed the event, and I hope they all felt as welcomed and encouraged as we did”.
- “The staff on the desk were very informative about the history of the town hall, mayoress and predecessors, and Rotherham as a whole. They turned what was a distressing and stressful morning for our foster child into an interesting experience. We would like to pass on our many thanks, keep up the good work!”

II. PUBLIC HEALTH

It is a statutory requirement to report annually on the complaints received for Public Health Services. Please note that the Public Health department predominately commission services and it is the commissioned service providers who will respond to any formal complaints via their own complaint procedures. The information below relates compliments and to complaints responded to by the Public Health Services directly under the council's complaint procedure.

11.1 Key Headlines

- Four (formal) complaints were received. (1 in 2018/19)
- Two compliments were recorded. (1 in 2018/19)
- Two complaints were upheld and two not upheld. (1 not upheld in 2018/19)
- No complaints were investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- 100% of complaints were resolved within statutory timescales. (100%, 1 out of 1 in 2018/19)

11.2 Complaints

The subject matter of each complaint received is listed below:

Health Care Public Health/Public Health Intelligence

- Complaint about unpaid postage on letter.
- The behaviour of the a staff member at Parkwood Healthcare and a query about a slimming programme.
- Unhappy that the council and the NHS has shared his information, as far as they are aware, without informing them.
- Unhappy that they received a letter addressed to their deceased partner.

11.3 Compliments

Two received

Health Care Public Health/Public Health Intelligence

- “The young woman who answered the phone, B, was really helpful and pleasant, a wonderful ambassador for the provision”.

Health Improvement

- “Since V has come into the post, things, have moved at quite a pace. It has led to a visible increase in awareness amongst all staff. More clients are referred to the Hospital for treatment as a result”.

12. NEXT STEPS, 2020/21

During 2019/20 the numbers of complaints increased demonstrating the challenges facing the Council and the pressures on the delivery of services. The need to manage budget savings continues to change the way services are delivered and therefore negatively impact on the perceptions of residents. Therefore, it is vital that complaints are responded to in a timely manner and the complaints procedures work effectively for both customers and staff.

The following were the planned actions in 2020/21 to ensure that the way the Council deals with complaints and responds to customer feedback continues to improve.

However, it should be noted that the global pandemic, although not significantly impacting on complaints in 2019/20 (the first lockdown occurred in the last two weeks of the financial year), it has impacted complaints and the ability of the Complaints Team to deliver improvement actions in the year. Therefore, any actions not delivered will be carried forward into the next year.

Key actions include:

- In response to The Charter for Social Housing Residents Social Housing White Paper and new powers of the Housing Ombudsman, the Housing Complaint Procedure will be changed. The Complaint Policy will be amended to reflect these changes. (shorter complaint response timescales, new approach to 2nd stage complaints, strengthen the engagement of tenants)
- Working with Tenants Scrutiny panel to review Housing Complaints and to consider the changes to be introduced in response to the White Paper
- New case management system in the Complaints Team. This will include a full review of the processes around formal complaints and compliments
- Update the Complaints Policy to ensure that the way complaints are responded to is up to date and providing the best value to residents
- Complete the review of all customer complaint literature, including website information, easy read guidance and information for children and young people
- Review complaints training for staff. Continue to seek ways to deliver training to front line staff to allow them to understand the role and purpose of the complaint procedures
- Work with Management meetings in all Departments to create a learning from complaints programme. That all learning reported is considered and the impact of service improvement is understood and recorded
- Work to improve performance within statutory timescales
- Complete the procurement exercise for Children's Social Care Independent Officers
- Working with Healthwatch Rotherham to implement a Council and NHS Complaint Managers group in Rotherham.

APPENDIX ONE

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decisions 2019/20, Rotherham Council and statistical neighbours

Authority Name	Invalid or Incomplete	Advice Given	Referred Back for Local Resolution	Closed after Initial Enquiries	Not Upheld	Upheld	Total Investigated	Total	Uphold Rate (%)	Average uphold rate (%) of similar authorities
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council	1	0	29	19	4	3	7	56	43	67
Rotherham Council	5	0	29	25	3	4	7	66	57	67
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council	1	4	16	21	4	4	8	50	50	67
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council	5	0	17	7	2	6	8	37	75	67
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	0	4	25	24	2	7	9	62	78	67
Halton Borough Council	4	1	7	23	6	4	10	45	40	56
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council	4	0	14	15	4	6	10	43	60	56
Telford & Wrekin Council	3	0	14	16	6	7	13	46	54	56
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	1	1	23	15	6	8	14	54	57	67
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council	7	3	37	21	10	4	14	82	29	67
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council	0	3	16	15	8	7	15	49	47	67
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	3	5	30	39	6	9	15	92	60	56
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council	5	1	18	26	8	7	15	65	47	67
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	4	6	31	22	6	11	17	80	65	67
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	4	0	19	20	6	12	18	61	67	67
Wakefield City Council	3	2	18	28	12	7	19	70	37	67

APPENDIX TWO

Customer contacts 2019/20

Below is a summary of the customer contacts received during 2019/20 via some of the Council's key customer services. It should be noted that this document does not provide a comprehensive overview and those listed are only a proportion of the customer contacts which the Council received.

Face to face

Appointment New Claim/COA	157
Benefit Queries	1,058
Blue Car Badges	3,161
Casual Caller	32,419
Concessionary Travel	908
Council Tax	2,486
Forms and Evidence	3
Housing	8,297
Licensing	7,258
Non-Domestic Rates	46
Parking Services	330
Planning and Building	43
Rothercard	160
Total	56,326

Cashiers	16,839
Property shop	8,602
Total	25,441

Telephony

Contact Centre Calls	639,069
Adult Services	250,205
Children's Services	245,768
Council Tax	79,014
Recovery	35,619
Benefits	32,222
Property Shop	1,775
Housing Advice	56,830
Planning	11,772
Building Control	12,730
Licensing	15,530
Total	1,380,534

Self-serve

Email accounts	26,175
Automated Payments	60,926
E forms	139,246
Kiosk	49,583
Pay Point	211,144
Internet Payments (Incl PayPal)	105,594
Unique Web Visitors	1,324,812
Total	1,917,480

Overall total

3,379,781

