

ANNUAL REPORT COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

1ST APRIL 2020 - 31ST MARCH 2021



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I. INTRODUCTION

Rotherham Council is committed to being open and accountable, listening to the views of residents and communities and placing them at the heart of its services. Customer feedback through formal complaints and the way that the Council responds to complaints are vital indicators of the overall performance of the organisation. When we cannot resolve a problem straight away our residents have the safety net of a formal complaint procedure through which they can find a resolution.

The way that the Council provided its services during 2020-21 was fundamentally impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic will continue to be felt across the borough for a long time, affecting the economy, the community and daily life. In terms of formal complaints, it has had the effect of reducing the numbers received; at the start of the pandemic in 2020, during the first lockdown, some Council services were reduced and residents themselves made less complaints. Numbers received returned to average levels later in 2020 and into 2021 but the information provided in this report should be understood in the wider context of an unprecedented global event impacting on both Council services and the lives of our residents.

It should be noted that the Council's complaint service was not suspended, despite the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman temporarily declining new complaints and some Council services being placed on hold.

Despite the impact of the pandemic, the Council continued to maintain a high level of performance and improved the quality of service offered to residents. There is a continued commitment to providing high quality, timely responses to formal complaints, and we continue to learn and improve based on the feedback received. Performance was again above the five-year average (84%) with 86% of complaints being resolved in time.

The purpose of this report is to outline the complaints and compliments that the Council received during 1st April 2020-31st March 2021, highlighting key themes and trends. The report also explains how the Council has performed against the required standards and 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, and in respect of the Council's handling of complaints throughout the year. The questions and queries raised are noted and subject to consideration.

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 2020/21.

Furthermore, building on the key developments in 2020/21, priority areas of focus for next year will include:

- Continuing to improve the way in which the Council learns from complaints. That all learning reported is considered and the impact of service improvement is understood and recorded. This will also include a revised protocol around learning from Ombudsman complaints.
- Working to ensure that complaint investigations are more outcome focussed. Resolving the complaint and finding solutions should be at the centre of all investigations.
- Working to improve performance to complaint procedure timescales.
- Ensuring remedy requests by the Ombudsman are completed within required timescales.
- Increasing the number of compliments recorded, with the Complaints Team continuing to work with managers to ensure that the process for recording and reporting compliments is improved.

2. KEY HEADLINES – 2020/21

931

complaints
received

Fewer complaints were received.
(931 in 2020/21 compared with 1,372 in 2019/20, which is a decrease of 32%).

Fewer compliments were received.
(695 in 2020/21 compared with 794 in 2019/20, which is a decrease of 12%).



Fewer complaints were upheld; at 235 or 26%.
(365 or 27% upheld 2019/20).

Fewer complaints were responded to within timescales.
(86% in 2020/21 compared with 89% in 2019/20).



Six complaints were investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
(Seven in 2019/20 in comparison).

Fewer complaints around quality of service.
(325 compared to 632 in 2019/20, a decrease of 49%).



Fewer complaints regarding actions of staff.
(134 compared to 199 in 2019/20, a decrease of 33%).

More complaints were responded to in time in Adult Social Care.
(85% in 2020/21 compared to 73% in 2019/20) **and CYPS maintained performance at 83%.**



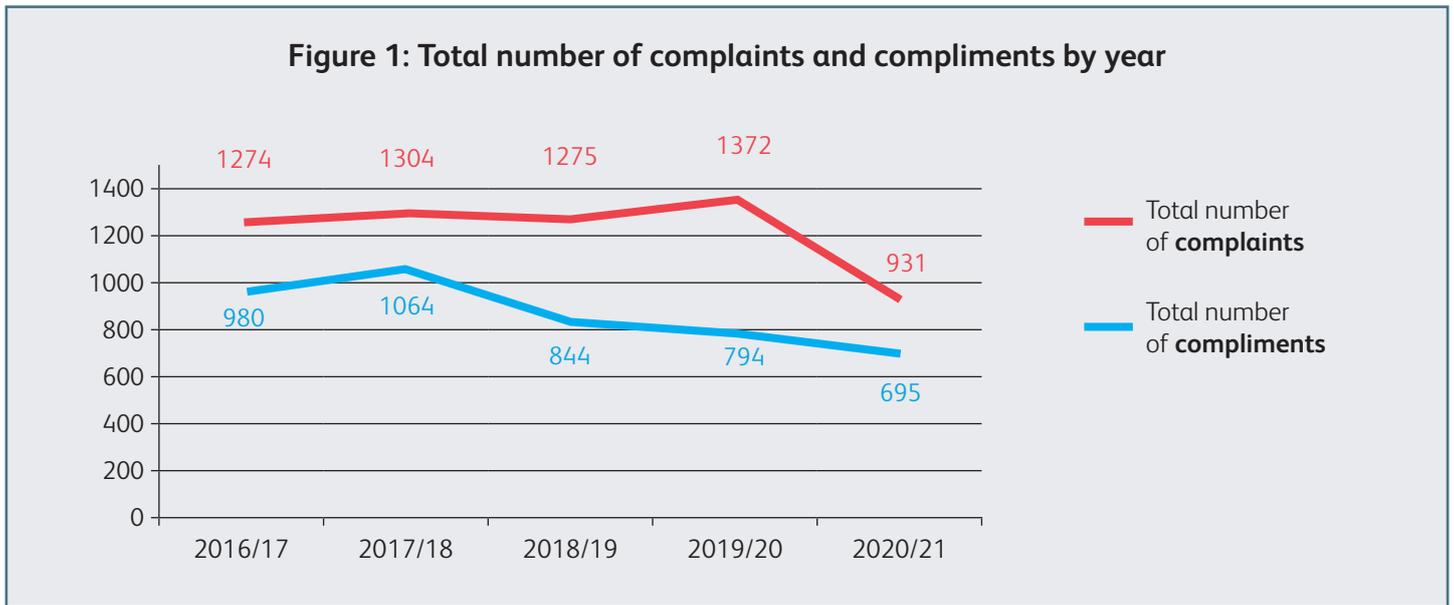
Fewer complaints were responded to in time in Housing Services (88% from 92%), Regeneration & Environment (84% from 88%) and Finance and Customer Services (89% from 94%).

Fewer escalations through the complaint procedure.
(25 or 3% compared to 35 or 3% in 2019/20).



3. OVERVIEW

3.1 Summary



In 2020/21, the overall number of complaints received by the Council decreased by 32%, going from 1,372 in 2019/20 to 931. As advised in the introduction of this report, this decrease is due to the reduction of complaints in the first quarter of 2020. 349 complaints were received in the first quarter (April – June) of 2019/20 compared to 135 complaints received in the first quarter of 2020-21 (61% decrease). Complaints then began to increase to average levels throughout the rest of the year. This is the lowest number of complaints in five years; a decrease of 441 complaints following an increase the previous year.

The Council provides a wide variety of services to over 264,984 residents. In this context, 931 complaints are only a fraction of the number of customer interactions occurring each year (for example, the Council received 1,146,218 unique web visitors in 2020/21).

The number of compliments recorded by the Council also decreased, from 794 in 2019/20 to 695 (a decrease of 12%). 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 received. 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.

As explained, all Council departments saw a decrease in complaints from the previous year. It is fully expected that the number of complaints received in the current financial year, 2021/22, will be back to near average levels continuing the trends over the last five years. (Currently 261 complaints were received in the first three months of 2021/22 compared to 135 in the same period 2020/21).

A breakdown on the numbers received and how much they decreased, by department is as follow:

- The largest percentage decrease was in Finance and Customer services from 182 to 76, a reduction of 58%.
- Children and Young People’s Services reduced from 147 to 86, a decrease of 41%.

- In line with the Council average decrease (32%), Housing Services decreased from 551 to 367, a decrease of 33%.
- Adult Social Care reduced from 72 to 48 and Public Health decreased from 4 to 3, both seeing a 33% reduction in complaints.
- The smallest percentage decrease was Regeneration and Environment Services decreased from 411 to 346, a decrease of 16%.
- Finally, Assistant Chief Executives remained the same at five received.

The following diagrams show the breakdown of complaints and compliments by Directorate in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

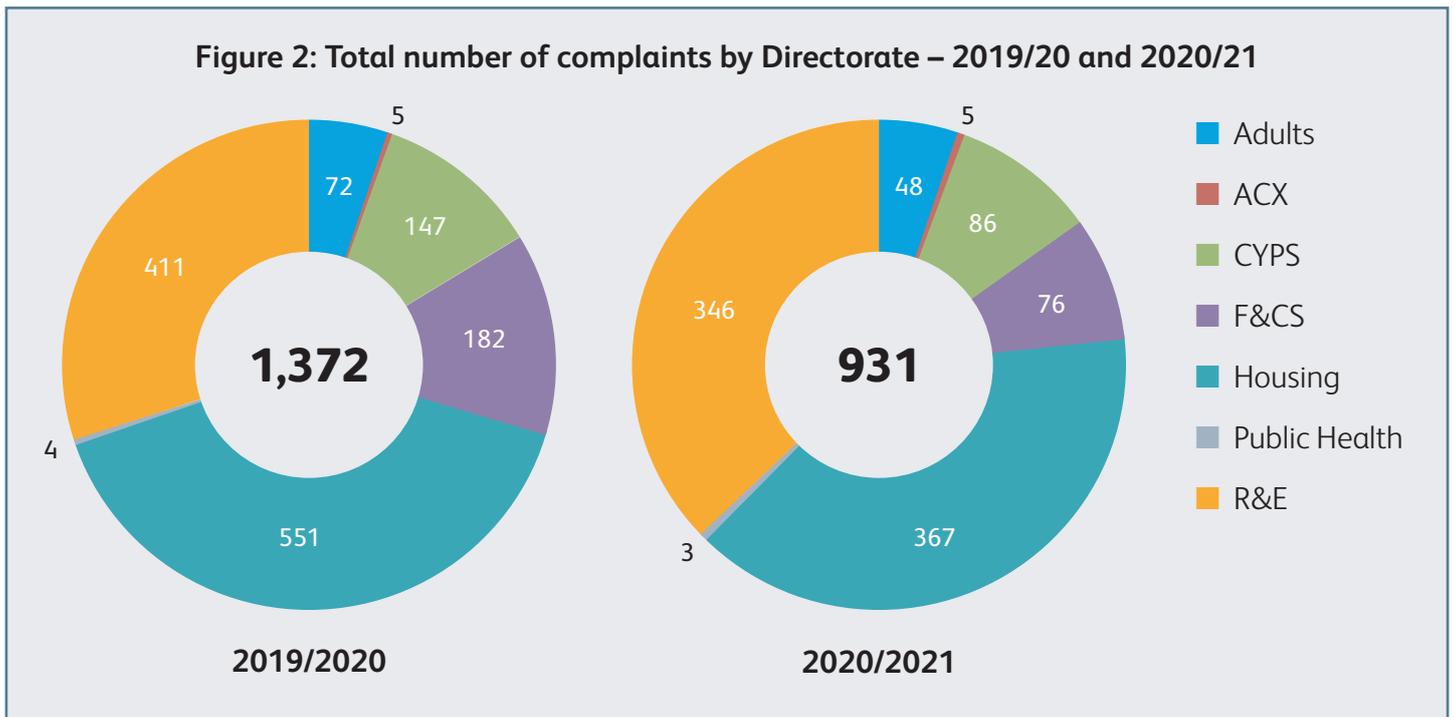
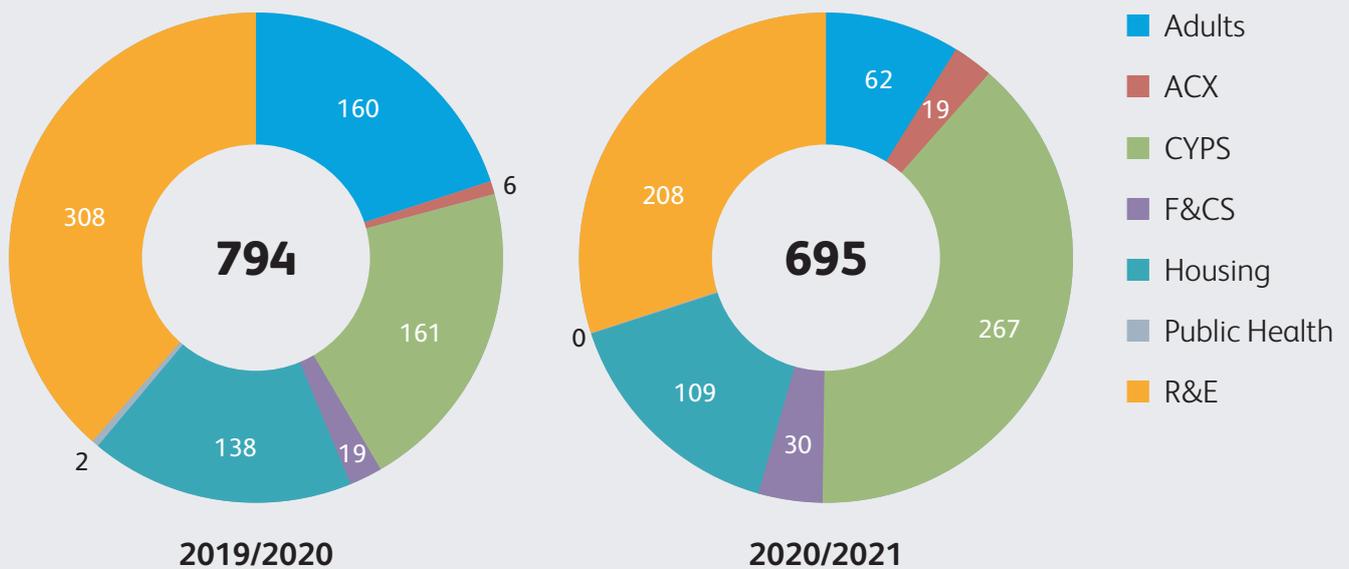


Figure 2 shows that the two highest areas for complaints were Housing and Regeneration and Environment Services. This is consistent with previous years' figures, as these areas typically receive the highest volume of complaints. They deal with the largest number of customers and are responsible for a high number of service transactions over the year.

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.

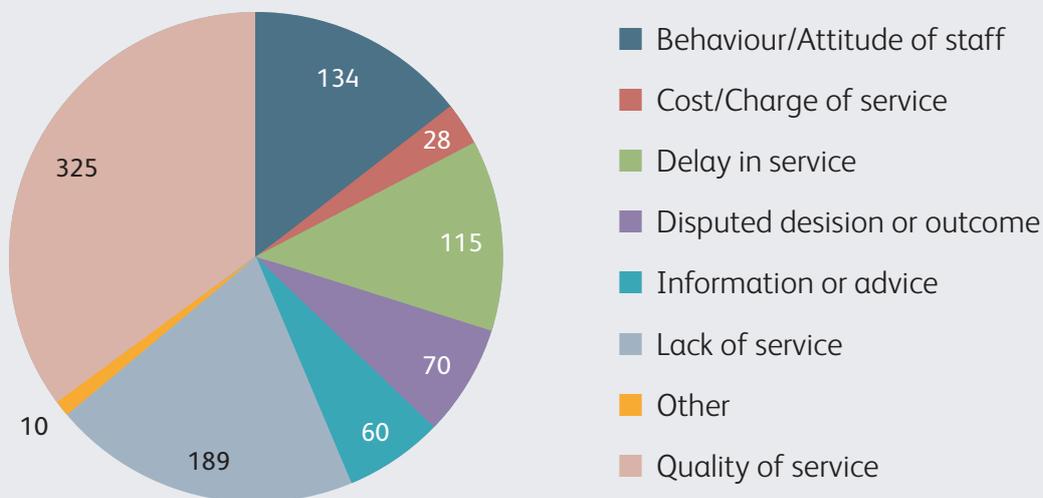
As explained, the number of compliments has decreased by 12%, however, the number received in Childrens and Young Peoples Services and Assistant Chief Executives increased. In Childrens and Young Peoples Services this is due to a better engagement in the compliment process by staff, making sure that all positive feedback is captured including feedback from satisfaction surveys. Compliments increased in Assistant Chief Executive because of the Councils Community Hub Service which was set up in response to the global pandemic and provided direct services to residents.

Figure 3: Total number of compliments by Directorate – 2019/20 and 2020/21



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 2020/21:

Figure 4: Total number of complaints by category – 2020/21



325 (35%) of all complaints were categorised as quality of service. Complaints within this category have decreased from 632 (46%) in 2019/20 (a decrease of 11%).

Lack of service accounted for the second highest category of complaints, with 189 complaints (or 20%) falling into this category. It should also be noted that in 2019/20 the second highest category of complaints was delay in service, but in 2020/21 this category was the third highest at 134 (14%) received.

Although the numbers of complaints in the categories of quality of service and lack of service were significant across all directorates, the majority of the complaints categorised as lack of service were within Regeneration and Environment Services, with 143 (106 in the Street Scene department and of these 81 were in Waste and Recycling) of the 189 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:

- Quality of Service Provided
- Standard of Work
- Behaviour/Attitude of Staff
- No service provided /Action Taken
- Delay in Service Being Provided
- Missed Appointment/Service
- Lack of Information/Advice
- Disputed Decision or Outcome
- Appeal/Inappropriate Enforcement Action
- Cost/Charge for Service
- Incorrect/Inaccurate written or verbal advice
- Application/Assessment Outcome or Decision
- Damage to Property

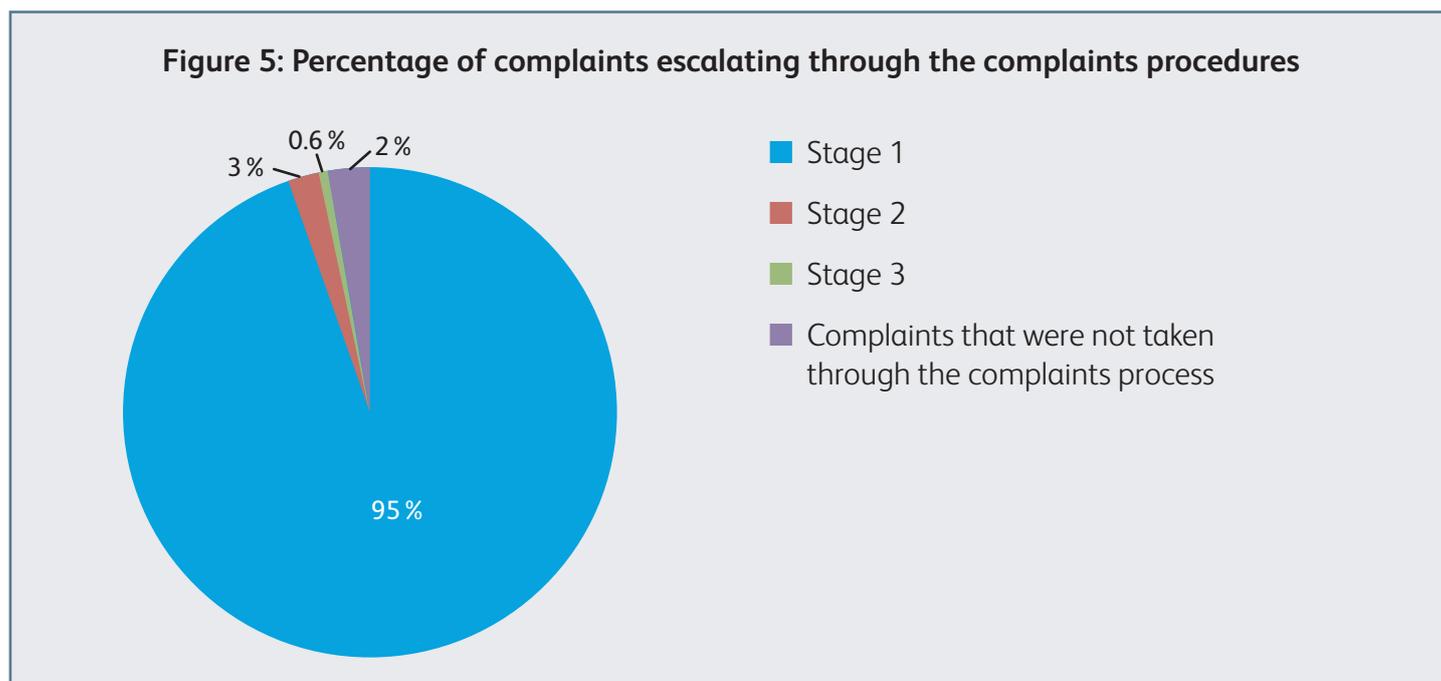
For further detail around directorate complaint trends please see sections 5 to 11 of the report.

It should also be noted that slightly less complaints were upheld in terms of the percentage of all formal complaints responded to. This is where we have investigated and found a problem with the service we have provided with 235 or 26 % upheld (365 or 27 % upheld 2019/20 and 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 three different complaints procedures: 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 proportion of complaints are not taken through the formal complaints 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 2020/21, this amounted to only 20 (2%) out of a total of 931 complaints (in 2019/20 it was 40 (3%) out of a total of 1,372 complaints).

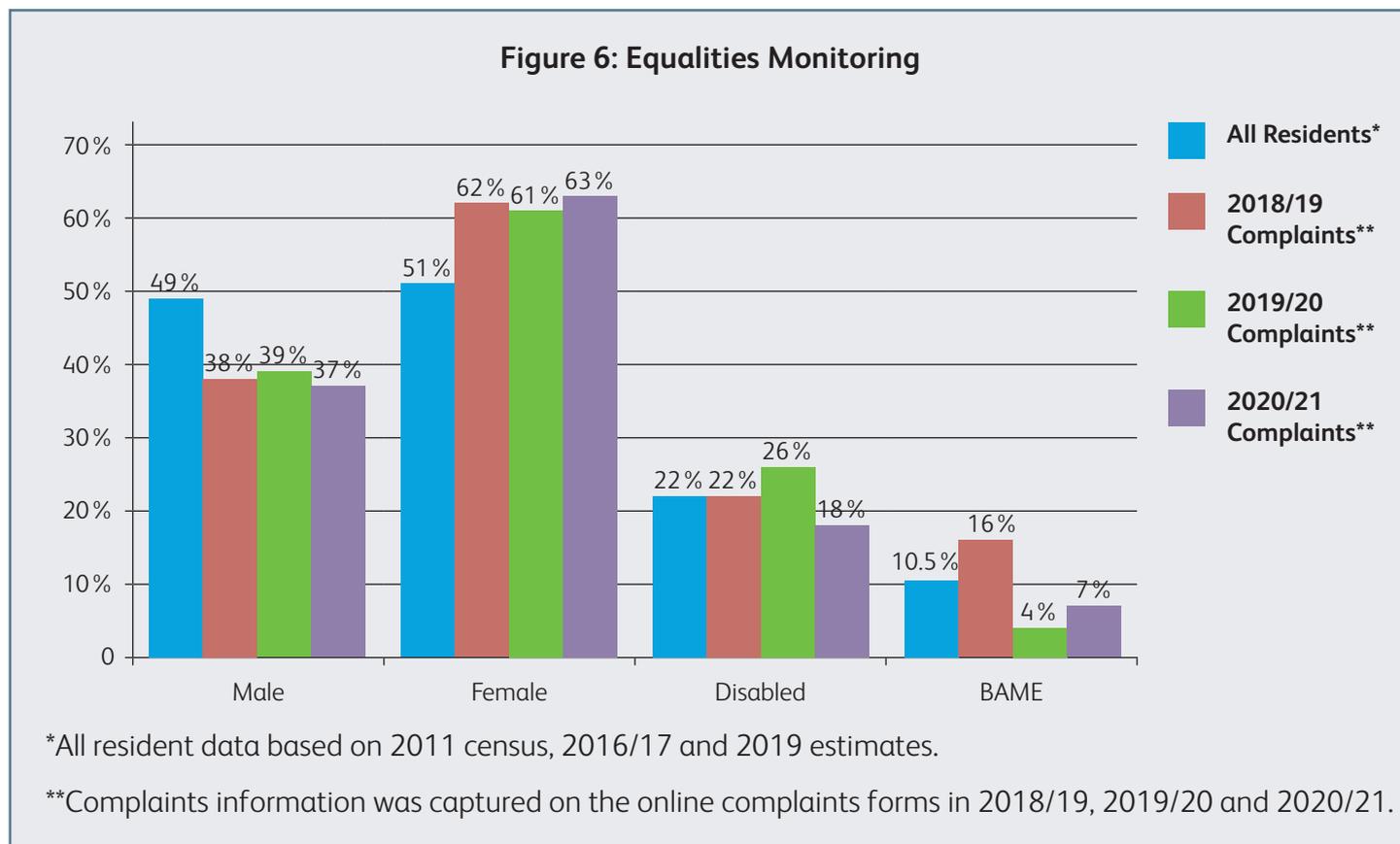


The diagram above outlines the number of complaints that reached the various stages of the complaint's procedures.

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 (95%) were resolved at stage 1 (only 25, 3% of all complaints, were escalated to stage 2, compared with 31, 2%, in 2019/20).

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.



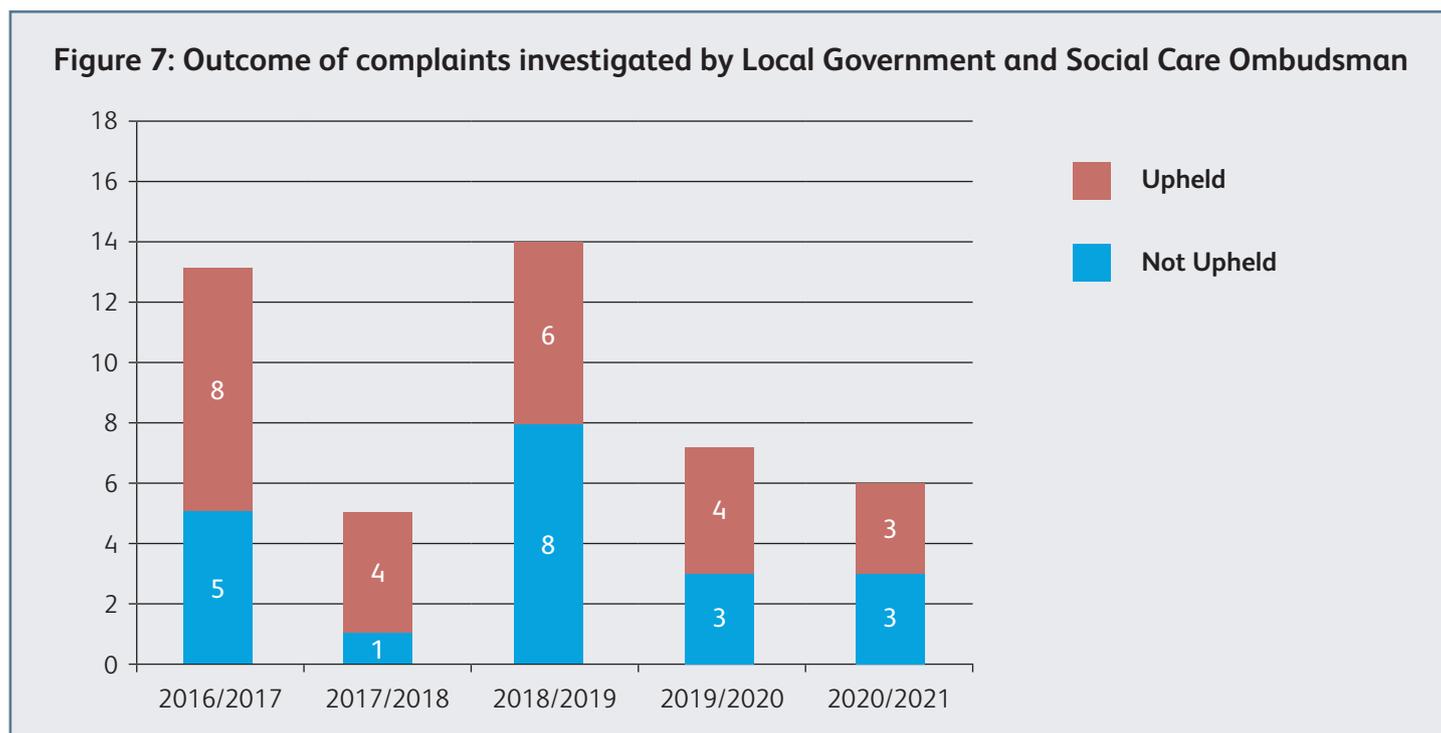
The information received indicates that significantly more female customers complained about Council services in 2020/21 and this is a consistent trend over the last three years. All directorates apart from Children and Young Peoples Services recorded a higher number of female complainants. For example, in Housing Services the percentage of female complainants was 65 % and Regeneration and Environment Services it was 58 %.

It is also noted that numbers have decreased for those customers who are disabled, and it is now below the average for all residents. In addition, the number of BAME customers who have made a complaint has increased but it is still lower than the average all residents figure (Please note the actual numbers recorded for BAME complainants are low, only 11 in total, one complainant recorded for Children and Young Peoples Services and five each for Regeneration and Environment Services and Housing Services).

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 escalate their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). 37 complaints enquiries were directed to the LGSCO in 2020/21 (72 received in 2019/20), and of these, the LGSCO investigated six (seven investigated in 2019/20). It should be noted that the LGSCO completely suspended their services during the first part of the year 2020/21 in response to the global pandemic. This has had the effect of reducing the number of enquiries overall but the number of investigations were not similarly affected, serious cases, those that the LGSCO considered they needed to investigate, were still actioned.

Figure 7 (see below) provides some context; on average, approximately 11 complaints were investigated by the LGSCO per year between the financial years of 2016/17 and 2020/21.



In 2020/21 less complaints were investigated and less complaints were upheld by the LGSCO than in the previous year. As explained, the global pandemic did suppress the number of contacts but the number of investigations was not reduced by the same rate. So bearing in mind the context, the number investigated 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 still 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 2020/21 and how these compare with 16 statistical neighbour councils. In 2020/21, the Council had the joint third lowest number of complaint investigations compared to its statistical neighbours, 16 other local authorities. In addition, its upheld rate at 50%, based on the total investigated, was below the average of 72% for similar local authorities.

Furthermore, it shows that the majority of complaints that were brought to the LGSCO (36 decided) 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 three complaints that were investigated and upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, two were in Children and Young People's Services, and one was in Adult Social Care.

3.5 Housing Ombudsman

From April 2013, the Housing Ombudsman has dealt with all complaints from tenants regarding social housing. There were four decisions made by the Housing Ombudsman in 2020/21, two were not upheld and two were upheld in part (two decisions in 2019/20, one upheld and one part upheld).

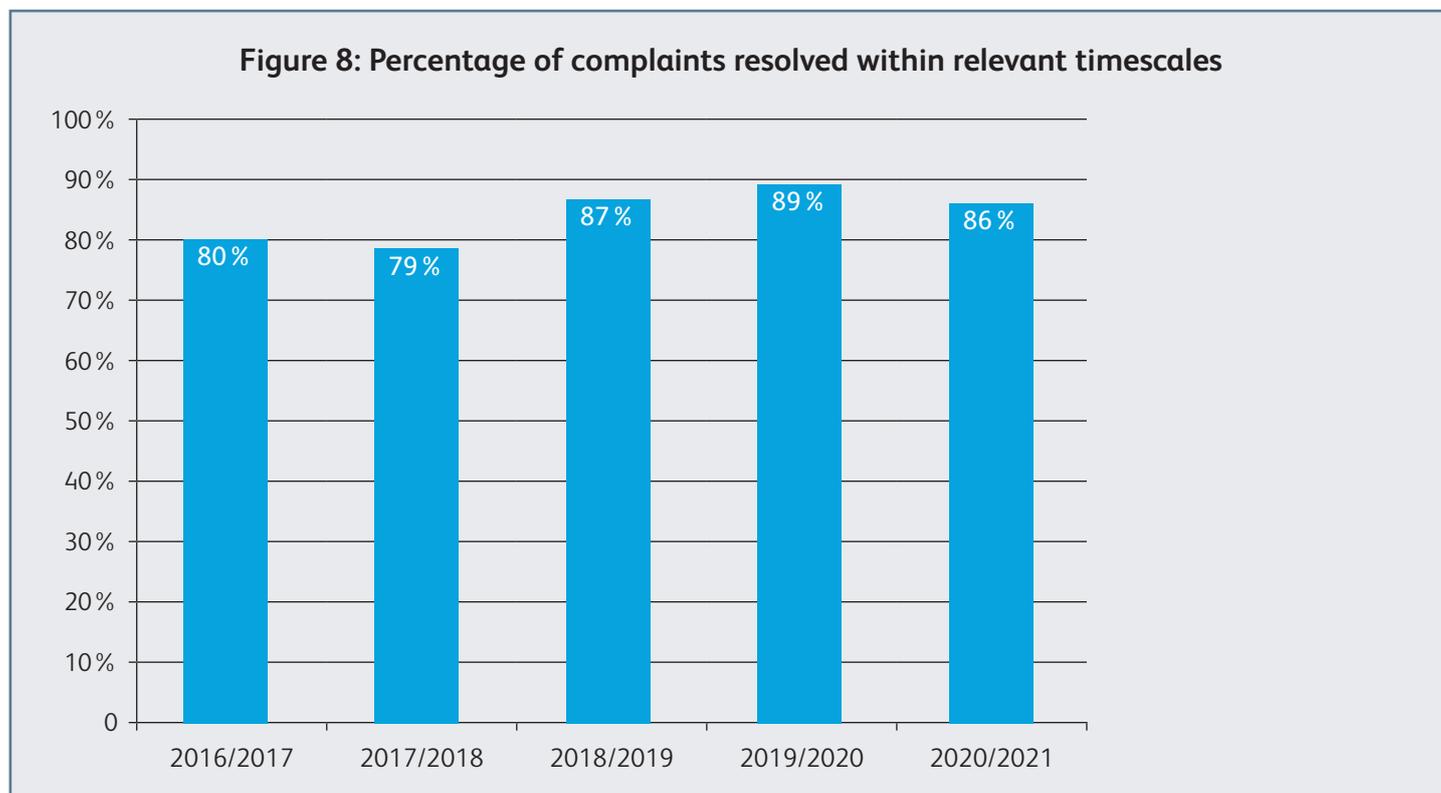
The partially upheld complaints were regarding the timeliness of repairs to a council property, the Council was asked to apologise and pay £200 in compensation and delays in responding to reports of ASB and damage to a property, the Council was asked to apologise and also pay £200 in compensation.

4. PERFORMANCE

4.1 Performance Overview

Performance against the time allowed by the formal complaint procedure is monitored through regular (weekly, monthly, and quarterly) performance reports presented to Council 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 has decreased slightly at 86% of complaint responses within target timescale. Although a reduction on the previous year's performance, it is still above the Council's five year average of 84% and maintains the higher than average performance seen over the last three years. 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. For the first time in five years Adult Social Care have achieved higher than the Council average at 85%.

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.

5. ADULT SERVICES

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

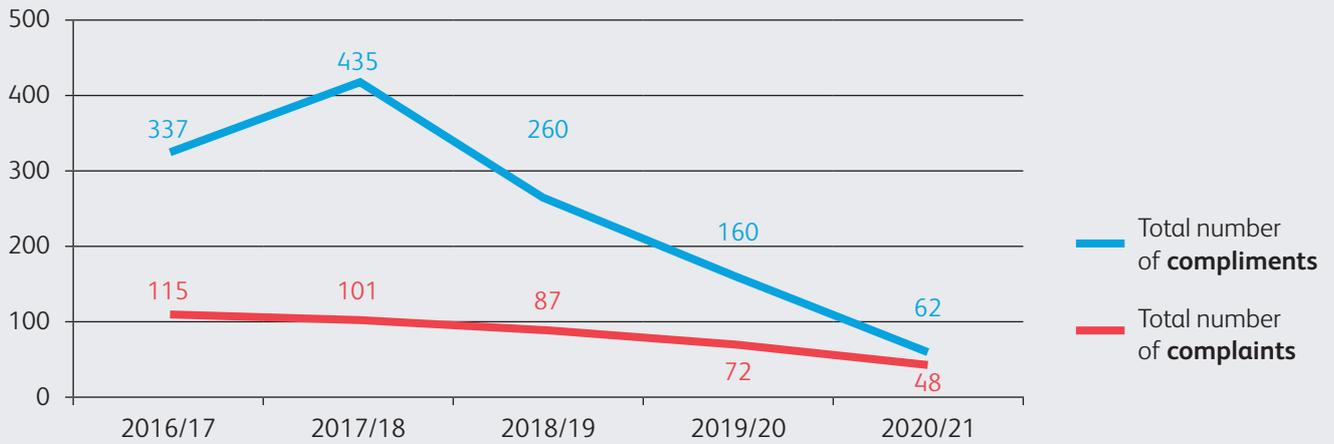


Figure 10: Percentage of complaints about Adult Care Services closed in timescales

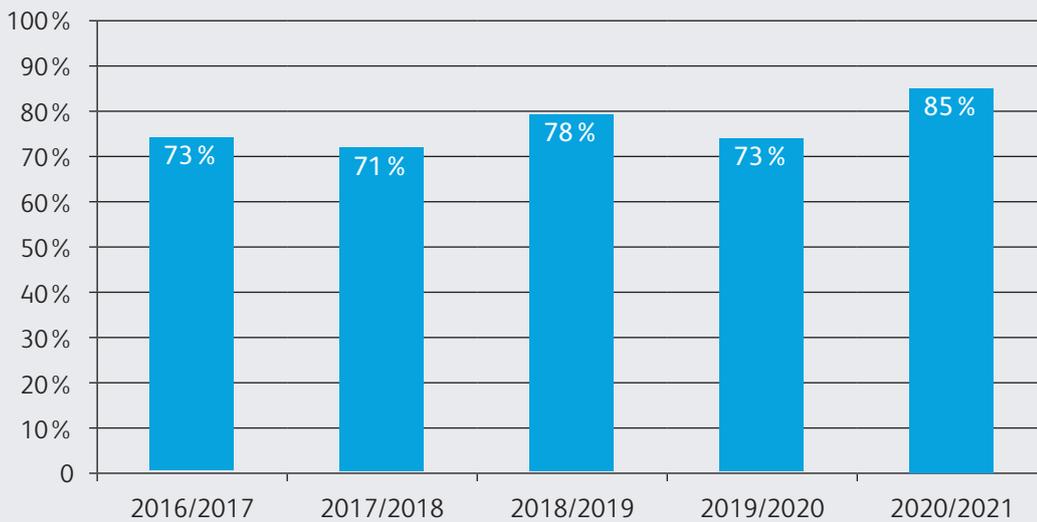
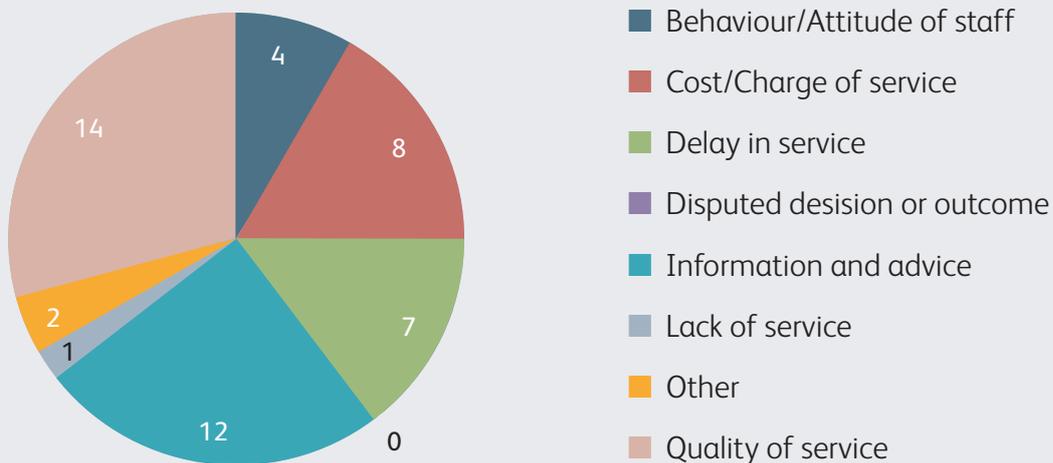


Figure 11: Complaints about Adult Services by category – 2020/21



5.1 Key Headlines

33%

fewer
complaints
received

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

(48 in 2020/21
compared with
72 in 2019/20).

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

(62 in 2020/21
compared with
160 in 2019/20).

61%

fewer
compliments
received



**Less complaints
were upheld.**

(14 in 2020/21
compared with
15 in 2019/20.)

**85% of complaints were
responded to within
timescales.**

This is above the
Council's five year
average of 84% and
more than 2019/20,
73%.



**One Ombudsman
complaint decision
was received.**

It was upheld.

**14 of 48 complaints
were regarding quality
of service and 12 were
regarding information
and advice.**



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

- Cost or charges for care
- Delays in assessments / reviews / request for contact
- Assessment Outcome or Decision
- Lack of information or advice / communication

In addition, the significant reduction in formal complaints is in line with the Council average reduction of 32%. The largest reduction was in the Locality Social Work Teams, they reduced from 37 to 21. However, in other service areas the reductions were not as large, and some areas did not decrease. For example, in the council's Access service the number of complaints remained the same, at 10 complaints, this was because the number of complaints for the Integrated Discharge Team (Hospital Social Work Team) which is part of this service area increased, from 4 to 7.

Examples of some of the compliments received for adult services in 2020/21:

“Many thanks for providing the (Enabling) service to me, it has been really helpful, and I am very appreciative of everyone’s help and support to get me back to being independent again.”

“I’d like to say a big thank you to who has helped us navigate the process to acquire respite, they have been a brilliant help & we are very grateful. It’s been a lifeline even in a time of lockdown.”

“I have found her to be absolutely fantastic, so helpful, pleasant and kind whilst being professional and extremely competent at her job.”

5.2 Lessons Learned

Adult Services made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2020/21. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

A customer’s complaint was considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, who considered that the Council was at fault in how it had dealt with its requirement to complete a financial assessment and then process a refund of care charges.

What did we do?

The Council worked with the customer and Local Government and Social care Ombudsman, fully accepting their decision and have agreed to the following improvements to service.

- Completed a review of our policies and procedures relating to charging for care.
- We will now follow up any refund payment made via a care home within a month to ensure it has been paid on time, taking action as necessary if it has not.
- We will not make any residential care placement that is in a person’s best interest subject to a third-party top-up fee.
- We have arranged training for relevant staff to ensure correct practice is embedded.

Who is better off?

Improvements to the Council’s Financial Assessment policies and procedures relating to the charges of care will benefit all current and future users of adult social services in Rotherham. Through better, timely and more customer focussed financial assessments and the procedures in respect of care charges, the Council will ensure that problems experienced in this complaint will not reoccur and that services have been improved for all residents.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

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

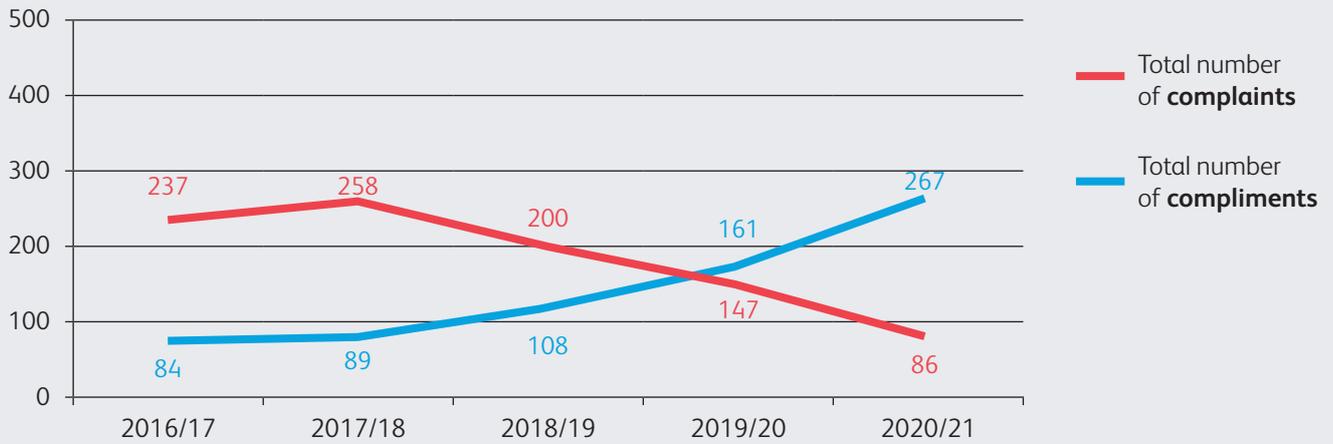


Figure 13: Percentage of complaints about Children and Young People's Services closed within timescales

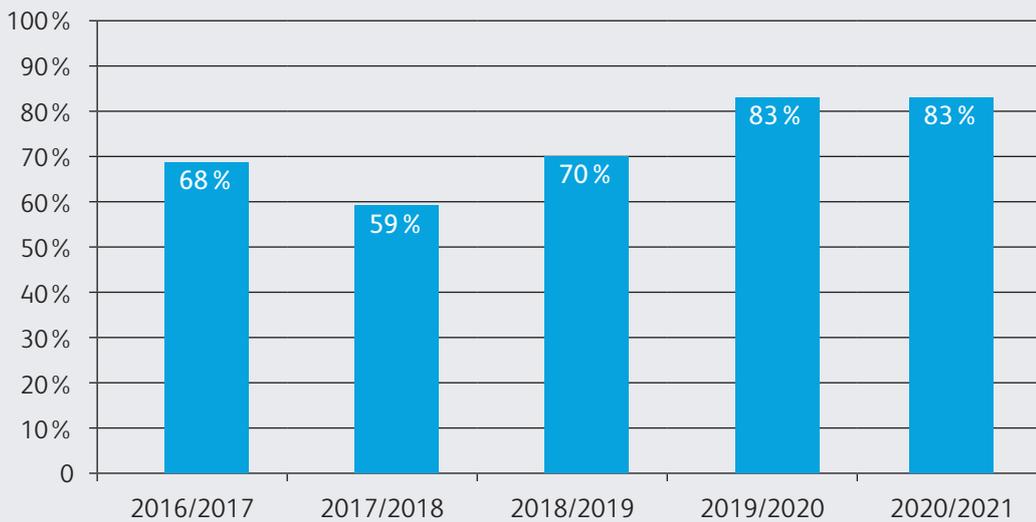
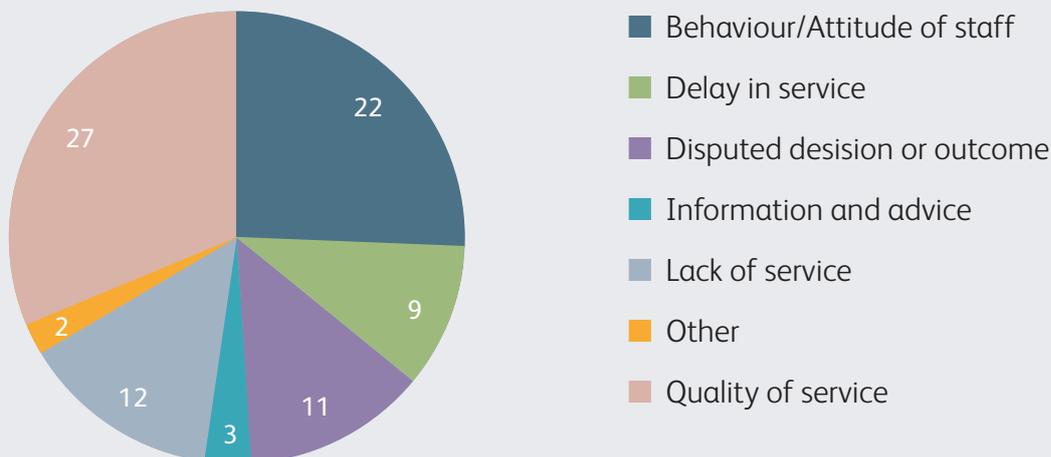


Figure 14: Complaints about Children and Young People's Services by category – 2020/21



6.1 Key Headlines

49%

fewer
complaints
received

Fewer complaints about Children and Young People's services were received.
(86 in 2020/21 compared with 147 in 2019/20)

More compliments were received about Children's and Young People's services (267 in 2020/21 compared with 161 in 2019/20)

39%

more
compliments
received



More complaints were upheld.
(45 in 2020/21 compared with 25 in 2019/20)

83% of complaints were responded to within timescales.

This is the same as 2019/20 and maintains best ever performance.



Four Ombudsman complaint decisions were received. **Two were upheld and two were not upheld.**

Most complaints were regarding quality of service, 27 of 86.

Followed by actions of staff, 22 of 86.



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. This is the second year where we have had a large decrease in the number of formal complaints.

Some key messages that have been shared with colleagues as a result of complaints this year:

- Using clear non-jargon explanations of processes and next steps
- Thinking carefully about sharing personal information even if between a couple and recording discussions and rationale carefully where information is shared
- Working more closely with settings around collecting and transporting children's belongings between placements
- Ensuring young people have bank accounts, ID and passports in a timely manner

Examples of some of the compliments received for Children & Young People's Services in 2020/21:

"She is a massive help, she's a 'godsend'. She's bubbly but relaxing, she tells me how it is in a friendly way, I trust her, she's like a rock, like a family member. It's good to talk to someone who isn't family, she deserves a medal."

"Communication has been good throughout. I like to see her, and she speaks to me and my child. I'm not afraid to tell her anything which is worrying me, and I feel she listens to me."

"The Social Worker listens and takes my views into account in a non-judgmental way which means I can open up to her. She is the best social worker we have had."

6.2 Lessons Learned

Children and Young People's Services made several service improvements in 2020/21 following the feedback from customers. An example of this is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

A complaint was made by an adopter about the quality and timeliness of life story work for their child.

What did we do?

Alongside the formal complaint response, the Service Manager and Complaints Officer met with the parent to listen to their concerns and view the document they had received.

It was acknowledged that there had been delays in completing the piece of work due to capacity. As well as providing a corrected life story, there were focussed discussions at Team Manager Forums to discuss the learning from this complaint and to ensure that all staff were aware of the impact of inaccurate information being recorded.

Who is better off?

Both children and carers will benefit from better quality life story work. For every child who enters our care, or moves to live with an extended family member, words and pictures will be completed, explaining decision making in a way the children can understand. Also, a later in life letter from the social worker who carried out that piece of work will be completed. The letter may be brief but will capture decision making as well as some of the anecdotal information, that for some of our children can be lost along the way. This can then be stored and will form part of a series of later in life letters which in time will ensure our young people have a sound understanding of decisions made that influenced their lives.

7. HOUSING SERVICES

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

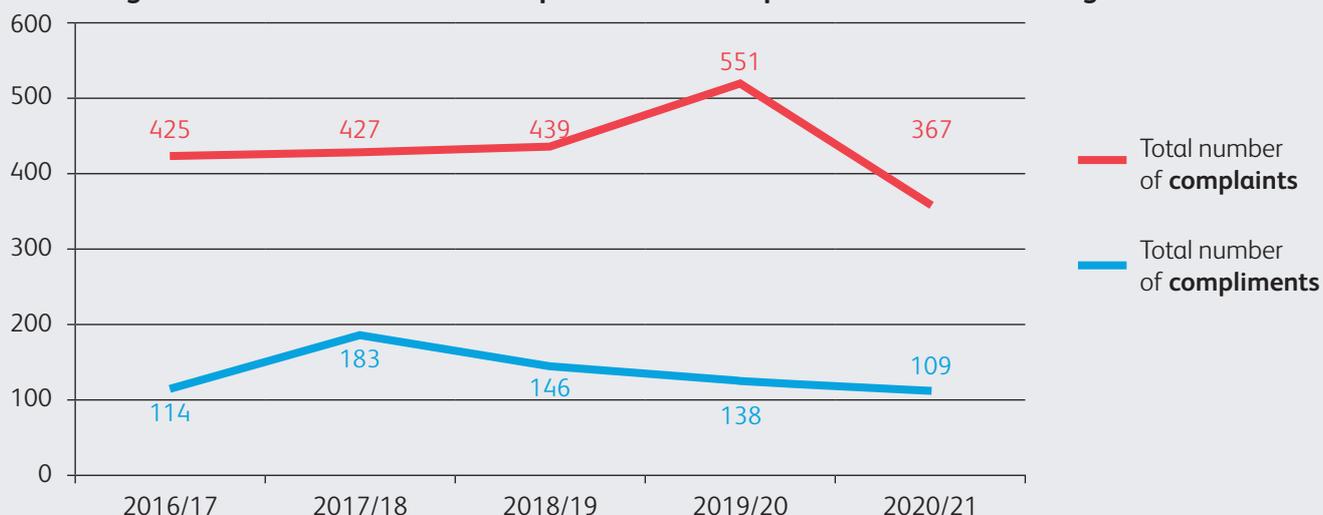


Figure 16: Percentage of complaints about Housing Services closed within timescales

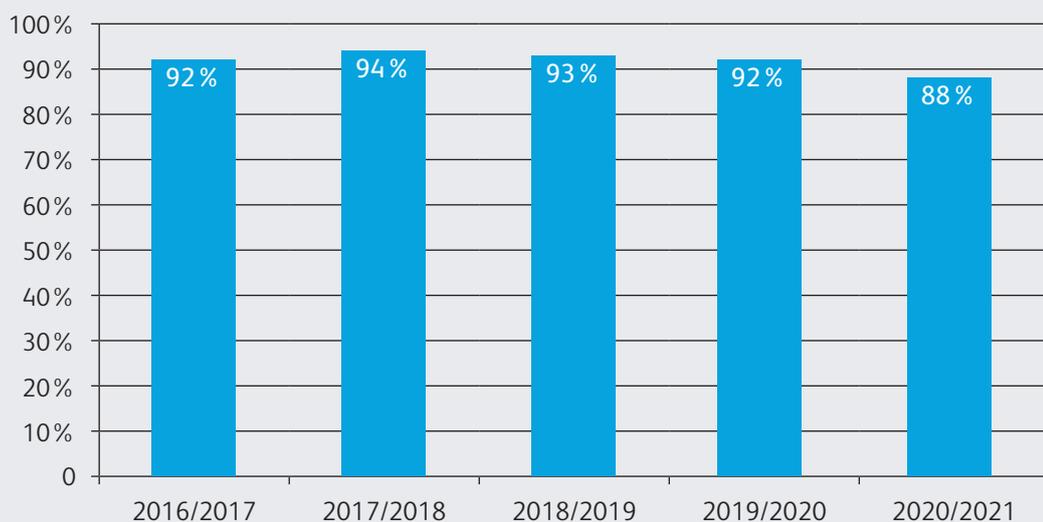
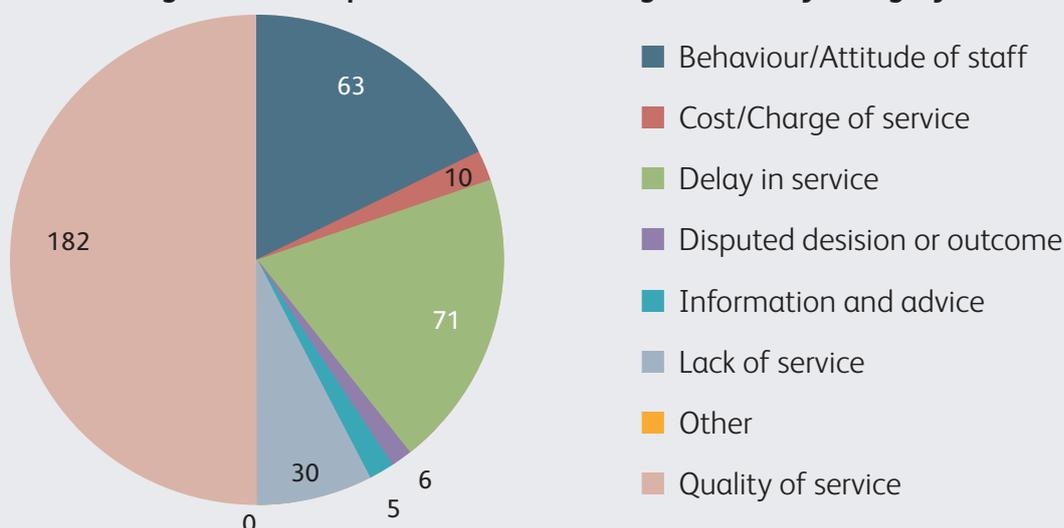


Figure 17: Complaints about Housing Services by category – 2020/21



7.1 Key Headlines

33%

fewer
complaints
received

Fewer complaints about Housing Services were received.
(367 in 2020/21 compared with 551 in 2019/20)

Fewer compliments were received about Housing Services.
(109 in 2020/21 compared with 138 in 2019/20)

21%

fewer
compliments
received



Less complaints were upheld.
(84, 23 %, in 2020/21 compared with 169, 31 %, in 2019/20)

88% of complaints were responded to within timescales.

This is above the five year council average of 84 % but is lower than 2019/20, 92 %.



Four Ombudsman complaint decisions were received.
Two were not upheld and two were partially upheld.

Half of complaints were regarding quality of service.

182 of 367 complaints. 71 complaints were regarding delay in service.



Prevalent themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for housing services complaints were:

- The Covid-19 Lockdown at the beginning of the year had a significant impact on reducing complaints as services were tailored to the pandemic, home visits, in all but emergencies, ceased during the first months of the pandemic. This particularly affected the repair services with non-emergency repairs being put on hold. Complaint levels were managed by contacting all those who had registered repairs and by an effective communication strategy advising customers of the change. The Income Recovery Team, a primarily telephone-based service experienced the lowest reduction of complaints.
- Communication remains the main cause of complaints particularly in relation to individual repair issues where customer expectation could be managed better.
- Delays in service, most specifically concerning repair delays and missed appointments.

Examples of some of the compliments received for housing services in 2020/21:

"I can't explain how amazing it's going to be to finally get my own place with the kids. It's going to do wonders for my mental health and fitness, and for the kids. Thank you so much."

"At a point in my life when I needed to be safe and secure RMBC and especially... ..were there and gave me the confidence to stay in my home. I cannot praise you all enough. Thank you so very much."

"Thank you once again for helping me with this stairlift .It's fitted and we are well chuffed I wouldn't have got this far without your help. The guys from prism company were excellent so if you can pass this on to them very friendly and explained everything. Thank you once again on behalf of my family too."

7.2 Lessons Learned

Housing Services made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2020/21.

An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

When fencing was erected around a bungalow complex a complaint was received advising that complainant's disability made it difficult to open the gate to their footpath. The protective fencing had been erected following a bid for Ward Housing Hub funding to create a protective space around the bungalows.

What did we do?

An apology was given, and the contractor returned to change the gate mechanism to a type that was suitable to the resident's disability. The consultation process reviewed, and the Ward Housing Hub application was changed to include two mandatory questions to prevent this happening again, including the question; Will this project have a positive or negative impact on someone with a disability? We have also improved the communication process around projects of this nature, so we will be able address any concerns much earlier.

Who is better off?

Similar future ward hub and security works will be beneficial to all, taking into account residents individual needs and requirements.

8. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SERVICES

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

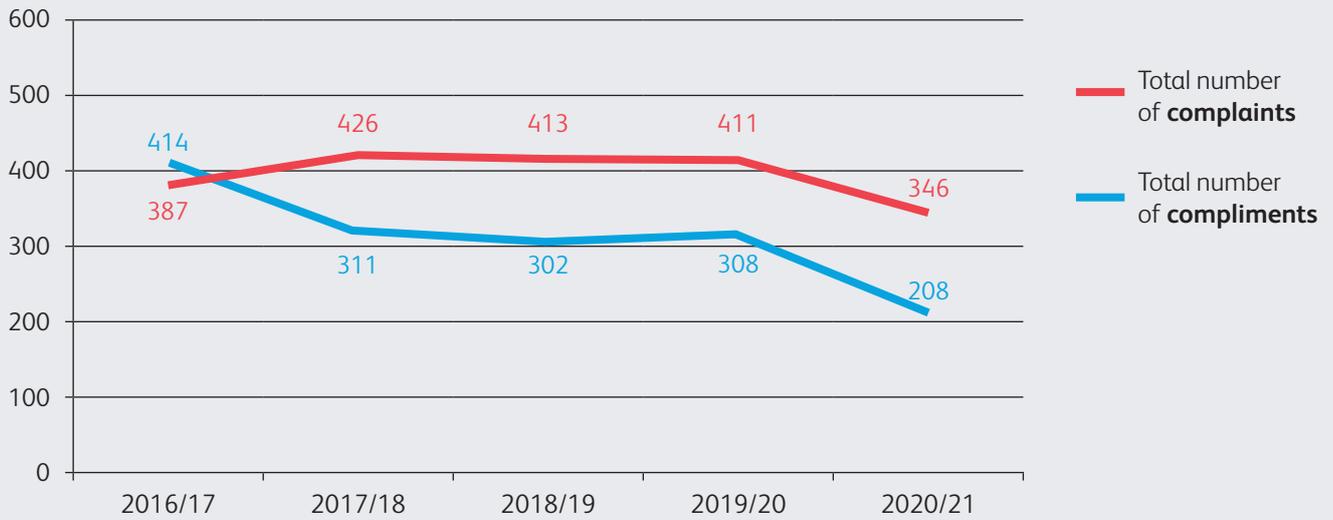


Figure 19: Percentage of complaints about Regeneration and Environment Services closed within timescales

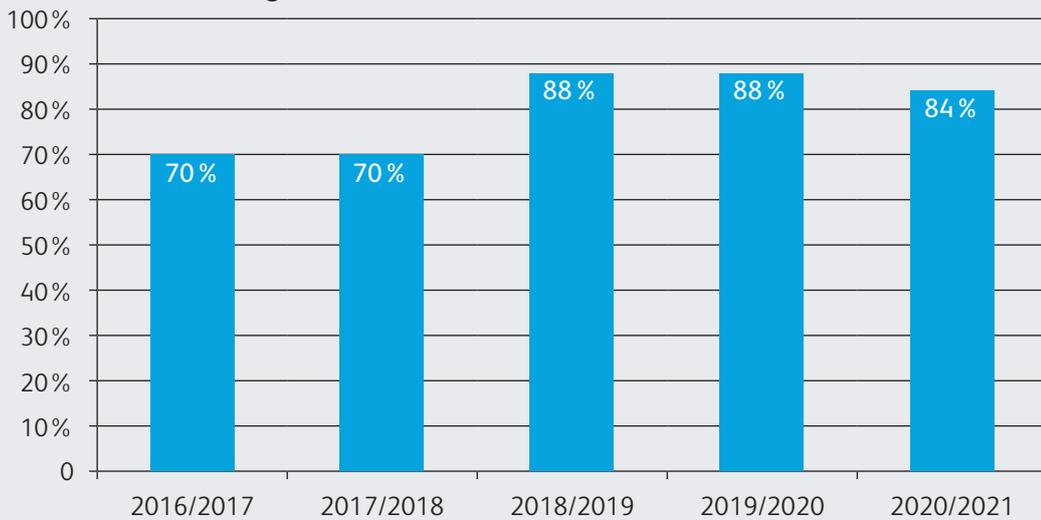
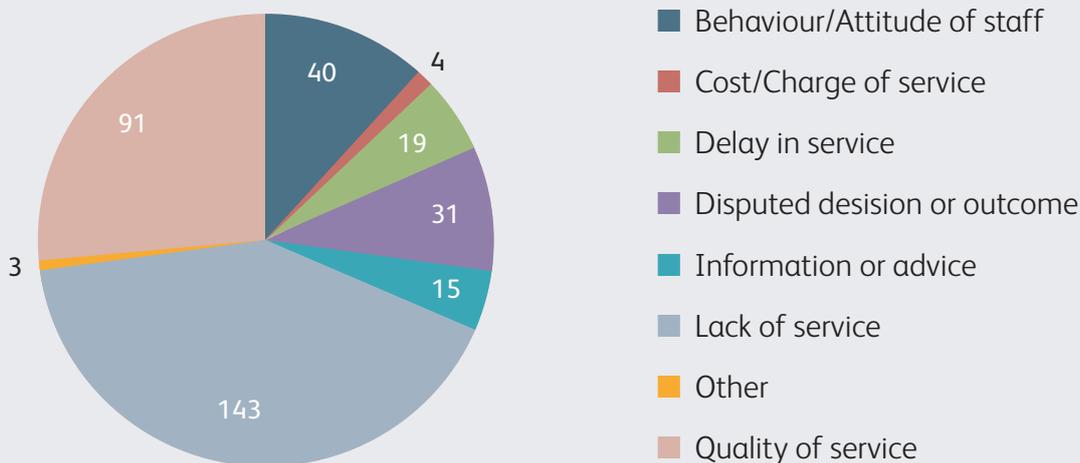


Figure 20: Complaints about Regeneration and Environment Services by category – 2020/21



8.1 Key Headlines

16%

fewer
complaints
received

Fewer complaints about Regeneration and Environment Services were received.

(346 in 2020/21 compared with 411 in 2019/20).

Fewer compliments were received about Regeneration and Environment Services.

(208 in 2020/21 compared with 308 in 2019/20).

32%

fewer
compliments
received



Fewer complaints were upheld.

(113 in 2020/21 compared with 122 in 2019/20).

Fewer complaints responded to within timescales.

(84% in 2020/21 compared with 88% in 2019/20).



Two Ombudsman complaint decisions were received.

Both were closed after initial enquiries with no further action.

41% of complaints were regarding lack of service (143 of 346 complaints).

91 complaints were regarding the quality 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 correct location.
- Delay in delivery of new and replacement bins.
- Restrictions, opening times and traffic management at Household Waste Recycling Centres as a result of Covid-19 pandemic.
- Planning decisions, planning process and lack of planning enforcement action.

In addition, the number of complaints decreased from previous years. The largest number of complaints were regarding domestic waste and recycling collections in the Waste Management service, with 142 received. In context, the next highest numbers of complaints received were in Household Waste Recycling Centres with 35 and Planning Development Control with 21.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Regeneration and Environment Services in 2020/21:

“Stayed with Nan, got her inside, got her warm and phoned for an ambulance for her. They stayed with her too until the paramedics arrived. Me and my family want them to know how grateful we are for what they have done, especially in the current circumstances.”

“Please pass on our thanks to the team of workers who have almost completed the work. Working in the current environment is difficult but is appreciated by our residents.”

“Please pass on our thanks and gratitude to the RMBC Highways team for the work recently completed. The roads are now much better, and the work was completed speedily and with the minimum disruption.”

“I thought I would take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks for the service and dedication shown by yourself and Team through the period of lockdown. I have always thought highly of Rotherham School Catering services generally but have seen the best of humanity recently by all members of the team.”

8.2 Lessons Learned

Regeneration and Environment Services made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2020/21. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

Complaints were received regarding the delays in accessing Household Waste Recycling Centres and centres closing earlier than advertised.

What did we do?

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in an increased demand for use of Household Waste Recycling Centres and restrictions in respect of the number of vehicles able to access the site at a time.

The Council introduced traffic management measures in response to vehicles queueing to access Household Waste Recycling Centres to ensure that this was done safely and provided staff to advise customers when queueing of the likely waiting times. The Council encouraged customers via communications to visit the Household Waste Recycling Centres at off-peak times.

The Council improved its published information regarding opening times to advise of the early closure of sites prior to the advertised closing time to enable the site to be prepared for closure. Queueing customers were also advised of closure times when queueing to access the sites.

Who is better off?

Customers were able to safely access Household Waste Recycling Centres and were informed about waiting and closure times, which resulted in fewer complaints regarding these matters.

9. FINANCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

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

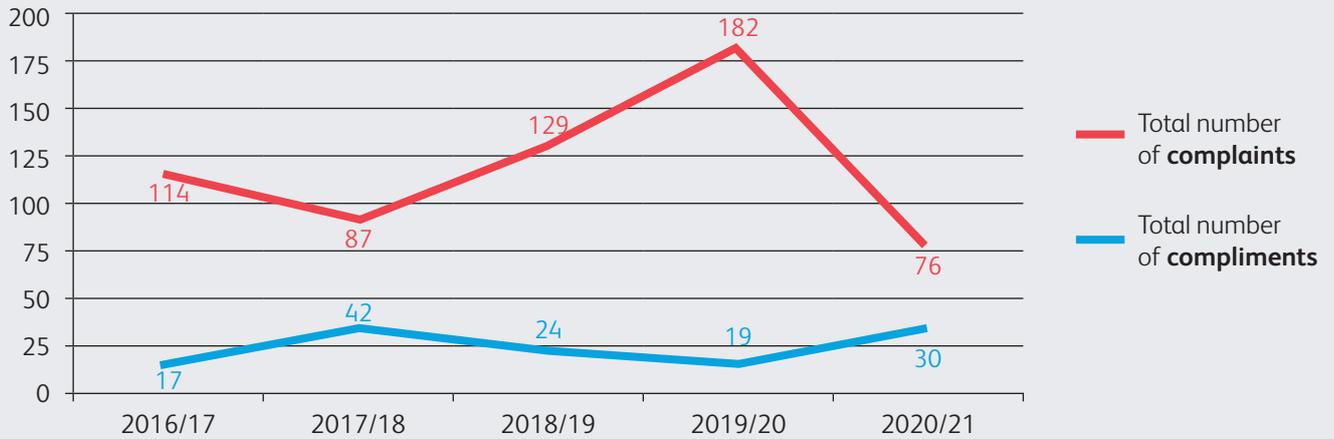


Figure 22: Percentage of complaints about Finance and Customer Services closed within timescales

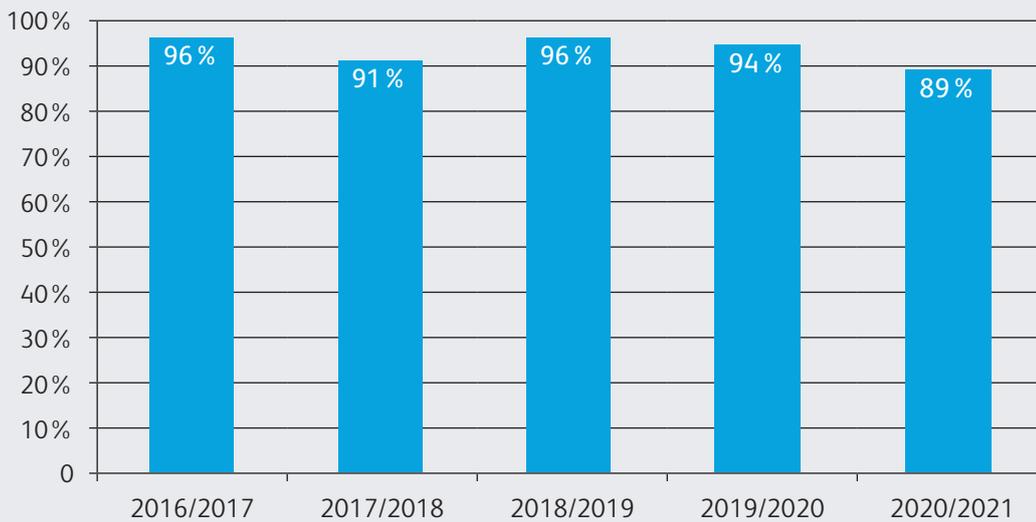
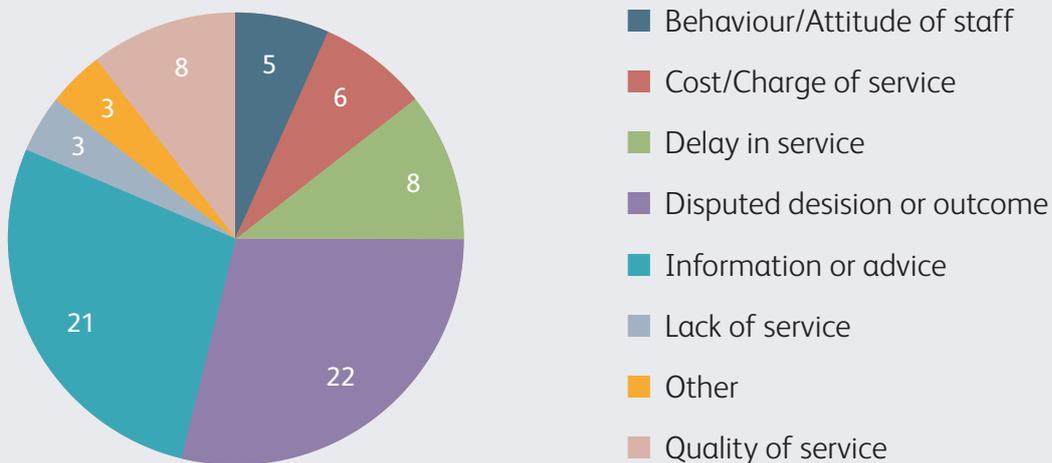


Figure 23: Complaints about Finance and Customer Services by category – 2020/21



9.1 Key Headlines

58%

fewer
complaints
received

Fewer complaints about Finance and Customer Services were received.

(76 in 2020/21 compared with 182 in 2019/20).

More compliments were received about Finance and Customer Services.

(30 in 2020/21 compared with 19 in 2019/20).

36%

more
compliments
received



Fewer complaints were upheld.

(10 in 2020/21 compared with 33 in 2019/20).

90% of complaints were responded to within timescales.

This is above the five year council average of 84% but is slightly lower than 2019/20, 94%.



No Ombudsman complaint decisions were received.

29% of complaints were regarding a disputed decision or outcome (22 out of 76) and 28% were **regarding information and advice** (21 of 76 complaints).



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

- Complaint about reported delays in applications for Disabled Persons Parking Permits including delays.
- Complaints about provision of advice and information in relation to Council Tax

The overall decrease in complaints for the directorate can be primarily attributed to a significant reduction of 71% in complaints received for Customer Services. Where in previous years call waiting times and delays in the blue badge application process had been prevalent themes; these two issues have both substantially reduced. This has been driven by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic which saw a reduction in call volumes and also by an increase in both staff numbers and the number of services available online.

In addition, complaints in relation to Council Tax have also reduced by 30% from the previous year reflecting the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the additional financial support to some customers in receipt of Council Tax Support, the deferral scheme offered to customers whose income had been reduced; and delay in the collection of overdue Council Tax which in previous years has been a feature of complaints received.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Finance and Customer Services in 2020/21:

“Just want to say a massive thank you, we received our grant today you don’t know how much this will help keep our business afloat whilst we are closed, it’s a massive weight lifted, I might be able to get a full night’s sleep tonight knowing we can now pay our staff and our rent. Thank you to all the staff at Rotherham Council who are still working processing all the grant applications, payments, and enquiries to help all our local businesses it means so much to us all. Thank you.”

“All of you need a medal and recognition for all that we have done for customers during the covid 19 and working through the difficult times and how we have kept everyone going with everything whilst the pandemic has been happening, can’t thank you enough.”

“The call was answered immediately and the woman who dealt with my enquiry was excellent and very helpful. Everything was well explained and straight forward. I felt very assured that the bill was being sorted and I was given options to pay in particular ways.”

9.2 Lessons Learned

Finance and Customer Services made several service improvements in 2020/21 following the feedback from customers. An example of these is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

A customer complained about the usability of the online application form for blue badges and the lack of accessibility, clarity and transparency in the application and assessment process:

What did we do?

The Council now uses the online form provided by the Department for Transport so that applicants can now complete an application under each relevant criteria and guidance for the applicant is provided alongside each question. The form also provides the facility for supporting evidence to be uploaded.

Who is better off?

The application process is now easier for customers who are able to apply against all relevant criteria and upload evidence at the time of application. This has led to a significant reduction in complaints received in 2020/21.

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 external 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 2020/21 is provided in summary below.

10.1 Key Headlines

- Five complaints were received. (Five in 2019/20)
- 19 compliments were recorded. (Six in 2019/20)
- All five were stage 1 complaints. No Stage 2 complaints.
- One complaint was upheld. (None upheld in 2019/20)
- One Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decision. (closed after initial enquiries)
- 100% of complaints were resolved within statutory timescales. (100%, in 2019/20)

10.2 Complaints

The subject matter of each complaint received is listed below:

Communications

- Concerns about the accuracy of the information on a recent briefing in respect of the Covid-19 crisis. Regarding the clinically vulnerable residents.

Human Resources

- Unhappy with how we have dealt with the enquiries regarding a request for a deferred SYPA pension to be put into payment.

Democratic Services

- The Planning Board meeting on 5th November 2020 is being held without it being open to the public.
- Unhappy with the scheduling of the appeal, feels it should be as soon as possible due to their child's circumstances.
- Was not able to access the Planning Board meeting.

10.3 Compliments

Examples include:

Six received

Complaints Team

- “phoned today to say thank you she’s not sure what you have done but the graffiti has finally gone.”

Community Hub

- “Thank you for the information about how to access supermarket delivery slots.”
- “Thank you so much for this information. I have been able to register them with Sainsburys and they are allowing one priority delivery per week — which is marvellous.”
- “RMBC seems to have stepped up to the mark admirably during this Covid-19 crisis. I know this is the general feeling here in Firbeck and I would just like to ensure that thanks go to those responsible.”
- “the Council have performed above and beyond... It’s not just the front line it’s the people in the back office as well.”
- “Many thanks for the information and for arranging for our medication to be collected, we are very grateful for the excellent service.”
- “What a nice polite gentleman delivering my prescription- thank you.”

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 to compliments and to complaints responded to by the Public Health services directly under the council's complaint procedure.

11.1 Key Headlines

- Three complaints were received. (Four in 2019/20)
- No compliments were recorded. (One in 2019/20)
- Two complaints were upheld. (Two upheld in 2019/20)
- No complaints were investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- 100% of complaints were resolved within statutory timescales. (100%, Four out of four in 2019/20)

11.2 Complaints

The subject matter of each complaint received is listed below:

Health Care Public Health/Public Health Intelligence

- Concerns around testing in schools and the scheduling of testing. Information and advice provided.
- Concerns around the accuracy of information in the "This is What a Community Champion Looks Like" booklet
- Concerns around the accuracy of information in the "This is What a Community Champion Looks Like" booklet.

11.3 Compliments

None received. Two received in 2019/20

12. NEXT STEPS, 2021/22

During 2020/21 the numbers of complaints decreased significantly due to the global pandemic. However, despite the decrease in numbers of complaints the challenges that the Council has faced over the last few years remain.

The need to manage budget savings continues to change the way services are delivered and this can have a negative impact on residents on how they view the services being provided to them. 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 2021/22 to ensure that the way the Council deals with complaints and responds to customer feedback continues to improve.

Key actions include:

- Continuing review of all customer complaint literature, including website information, easy read guidance and information for children and young people.
- Ongoing 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. This will also include a revised protocol around learning from Ombudsman complaints.
- Ensure remedy requests by the Ombudsman are completed within required timescales.
- Work to improve performance to complaint procedure timescales.
- Working to ensure that complaint investigations are more outcome focussed. Resolving the complaint and finding solutions should be at the centre of all investigations.
- Increase the number of compliments recorded, Complaints Team to continue to work with managers to ensure that the process for recording and reporting compliments is improved.

APPENDIX ONE

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decisions 2020/21, 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
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council	3	3	15	13	1	3	4	38	75%	72%
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council	3	0	9	5	1	4	5	22	80%	72%
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	2	0	9	4	1	5	6	21	83%	72%
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council	2	2	7	14	0	6	6	31	100%	72%
Rotherham Council	3	3	10	14	3	3	6	36	50%	72%
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	6	1	13	24	5	3	8	52	38%	72%
Halton Borough Council	0	1	4	5	2	6	8	18	75%	63%
Wakefield City Council	0	3	13	14	2	6	8	38	75%	72%
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council	2	1	10	6	5	4	9	28	44%	63%
Telford & Wrekin Council	0	0	6	17	1	8	9	32	89%	63%
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	2	6	16	19	2	8	10	53	80%	63%
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council	5	1	12	7	6	7	13	38	54%	72%
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	4	0	14	12	5	9	14	44	64%	72%
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council	2	5	12	9	10	6	16	44	38%	72%
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council	0	3	7	17	7	9	16	43	56%	72%
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	1	4	19	15	7	17	24	63	71%	72%

