

# ANNUAL REPORT COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2021 - 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2022



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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.

There was still a small residual effect of the Covid 19 pandemic in terms of the numbers of complaints received in 2021/22 underlining the substantial effect this unprecedented global event had on both Council services and the lives of our residents.

Overall, in terms of the complaints' procedure, 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 the Council continues to learn and improve based on the feedback received. Performance was in line with the Council Plan target with 85 % 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 2021-31st March 2022, 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 any changes to those services that occurred within 2021/22.

**Furthermore, building on the key developments in 2021/22, priority areas of focus, in respect of the Council's response to formal complaints, for next year will include:**

- Introducing a programme of improvement actions in response to the changes in the regulation of Housing Services (The Charter for Social Housing Residents), the introduction of Tenant Satisfaction Measures by the Regulator of Social Housing and a revised Housing Ombudsman code (see Section 12 Next Steps for further details).
- 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.
- 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 – 2021/22

**1,117**  
complaints  
received

**1,117 complaints were received.**  
(compared with 931 in 2020/21, which is an increase of 17%).

**More compliments were received.**  
(752 in 2021/22 compared with 695 in 2020/21, which is an increase of 8%).



**More complaints were upheld.**  
268 or 24%  
(235 or 26% upheld 2020/21).

**Fewer complaints were responded to within timescales.**  
(85% in 2021/22 compared with 86% in 2020/21).



**18 complaints were investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.**  
(Six in 2020/21 in comparison).

**Fewer complaints around quality of service.**  
(313 compared to 325 in 2020/21, a decrease of 4%).



**More complaints regarding actions of staff.** (145 compared to 134 in 2020/21, an increase of 8%).

**More complaints were responded to in time in Finance and Customer Services.** (90% in 2021/22 compared to 89% in 2020/21).



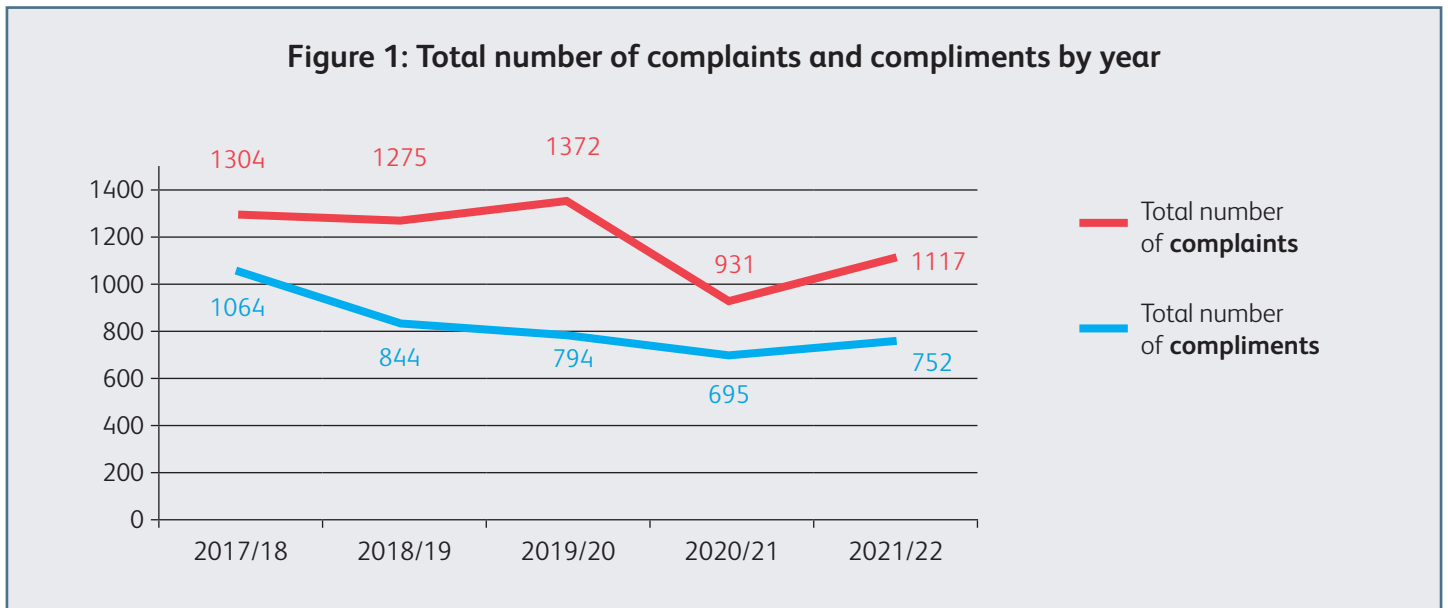
**Fewer complaints were responded to in time in Adult Care** (79% from 85%) **CYPS** (82% from 83%) **Housing Services** (85% from 88%), **Regeneration & Environment** (82% from 84%).

**More escalations through the complaint procedure.** (32 or 3% compared to 25 or 3% in 2020/21).



# 3. OVERVIEW

## 3.1 Summary



In 2021/22, the overall number of complaints received by the Council increased by 17%, going from 931 in 2020/21 to 1117. As advised in the introduction of this report, this increase is due to the normalisation of Council services following the Covid 19 pandemic. Complaints have begun to increase to average levels, but they are not quite as high as pre pandemic figures, indicating a residual effect on services and resident behaviour during the year. This is the 2nd lowest number of complaints in five years.

The Council provides a wide variety of services to over 265,800 residents. In this context, 1117 complaints are only a fraction of the number of customer interactions occurring each year (for example, the Council received 1,091,691 new web visitors in 2021/22).

The number of compliments recorded by the Council also increased, from 695 in 2020/21 to 752 (an increase of 8%). It is good to see that following a continued decrease over four years this year the numbers have increased. Improved efforts by Council departments to capture more of the positive feedback of residents is reflected in this increase. There is clearly better engagement of staff in the process of recording the compliments they received, staff have responded to requests that all the compliments they receive are recorded.

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

Most Council departments saw an increase in complaints from the previous year. This trend has continued into the current financial year, complaints are increasing back to average levels over the last five years. Currently 340 complaints were received in the first three months of 2022/23 compared to 290 in the same period in 2021/22, which is a 15% increase).

### **A breakdown on the numbers received and how much they changed, by department is as follows:**

- The largest percentage increase was in Finance and Customer Services from 76 to 108, an increase of 30%.
- In terms of the total number of complaints received Housing Services increased the most from 367 to 501, a percentage increase of 27%.
- Children's and Young People's Services increased from 86 to 110, a percentage increase of 22%.

- Adult Care increased from 48 to 52, a percentage increase of 8 %.
- Against this trend Regeneration and Environment decreased slightly from 346 to 341, a decrease of 1 %
- Finally, Assistant Chief Executive's and Public Health also saw a decrease in complaints received. Assistant Chief Executive's decreased from five to three and Public Health from three to two.

The following diagrams show the breakdown of complaints and compliments by Directorate in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

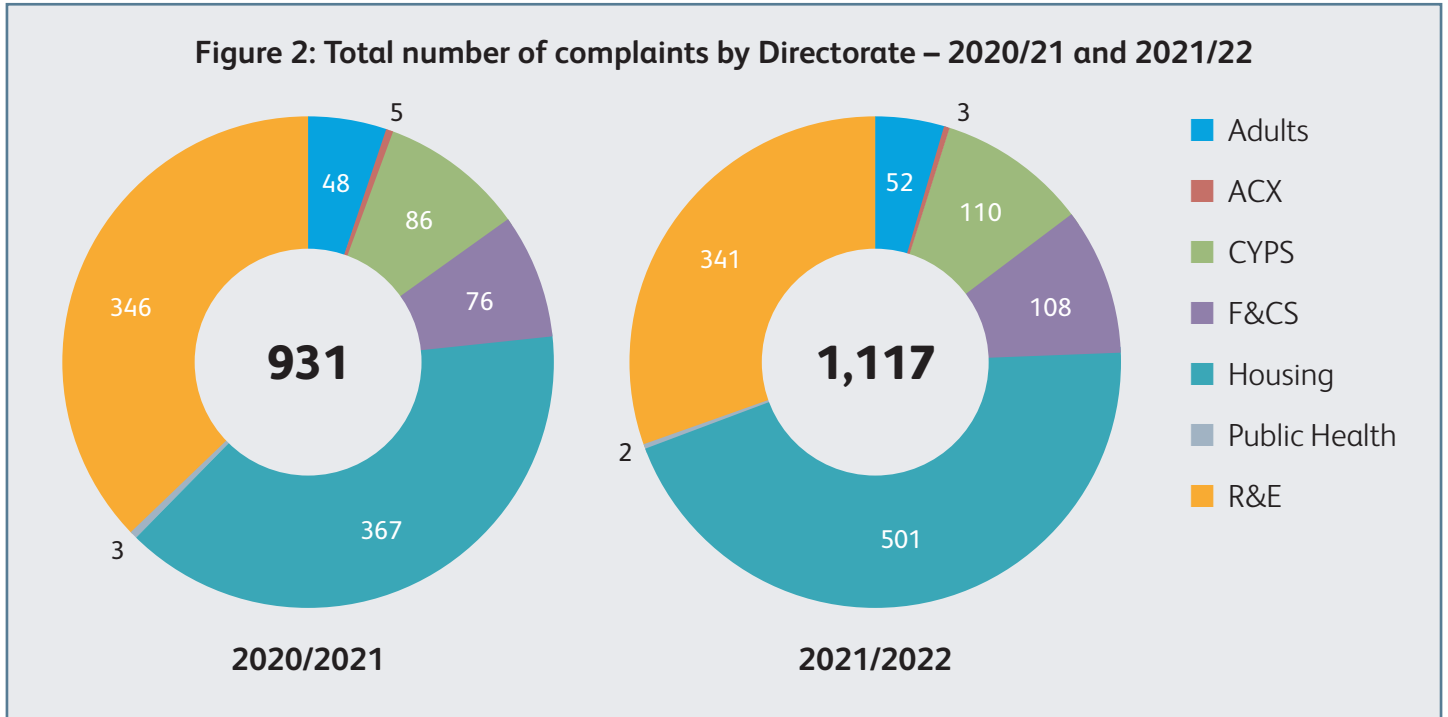


Figure 2 shows that the two highest areas for complaints were Housing and Regeneration and Environment Services. This is consistent with previous years' figures, as these areas typically receive the highest volume of complaints. They deal with the largest number of customers and are responsible for a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

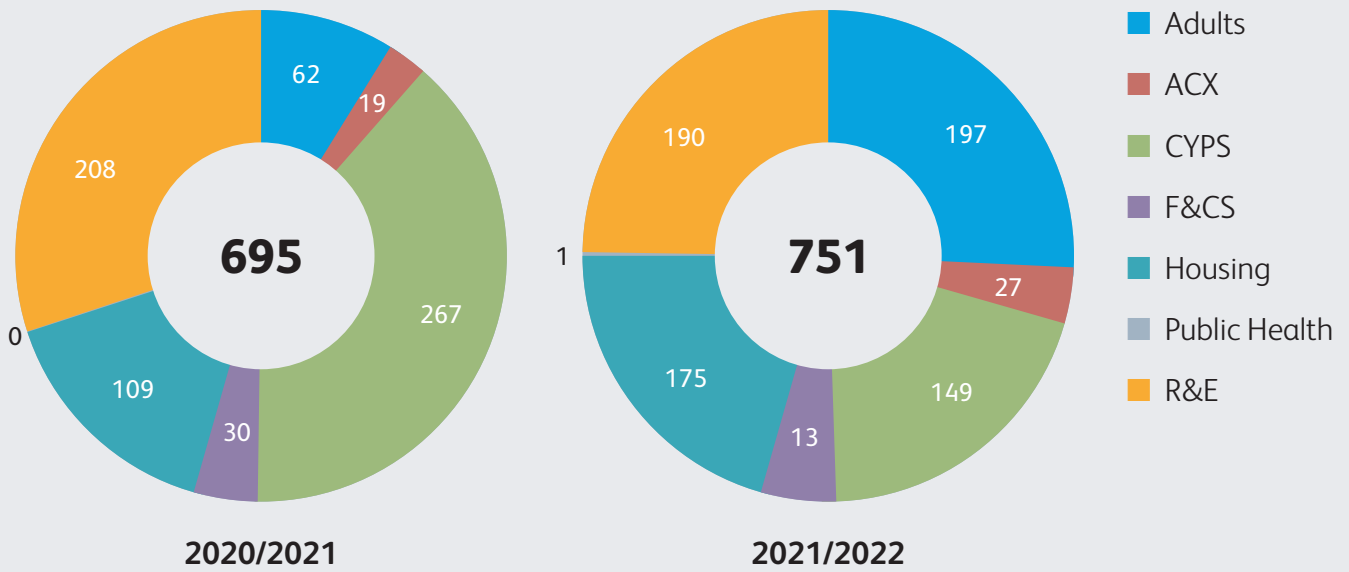
The number of complaints received tends to correlate with the number of customers that are served by the directorate. Therefore, a directorate receiving a higher volume of complaints is not necessarily reflective of poor performance and should be understood within the context of services provided.

Regarding the number of compliments received, this has increased by 8 % overall, 57 more received, however, some directorates saw an increase in the numbers received and some saw a decrease. Adult Care saw the biggest increase at 68 %, 135 more received, followed by Housing at 38 %, 66 more received. Public Health and Assistant Chief Executive's also saw a small increase.

All other Directorates saw a decrease with Children and Young People's Services with the largest decrease in terms of numbers received, 118 fewer received or a 44 % decrease.

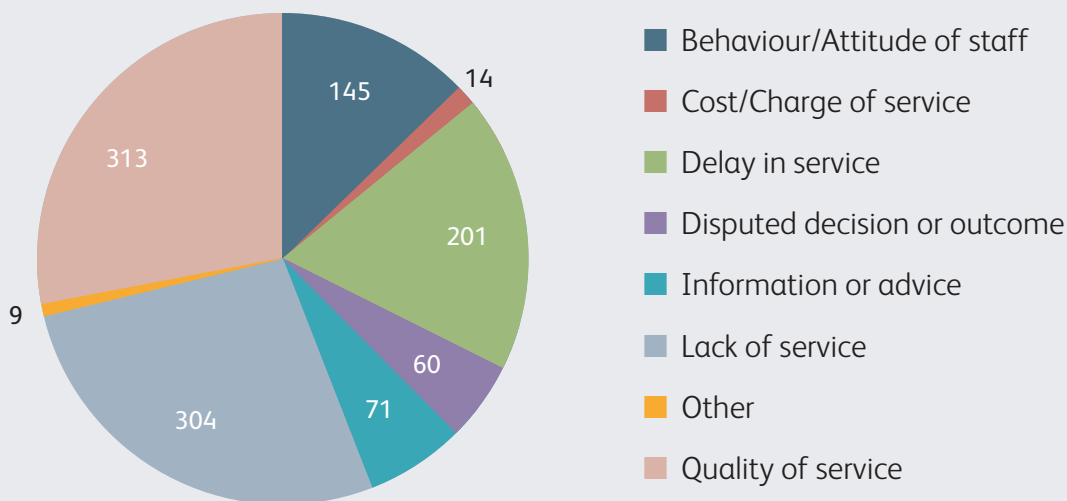
Although the overall increase is positive, the large changes in numbers received by directorate makes it clear that there can be a better engagement in the compliment process by staff, to make sure that all positive feedback is captured including feedback from satisfaction surveys.

**Figure 3: Total number of compliments by Directorate – 2020/21 and 2021/22**



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 2021/22:

**Figure 4: Total number of complaints by category – 2021/22**



313 (28%) of all complaints were categorised as quality of service. Complaints within this category have decreased from 325 (35%) in 2021/22 (a decrease of 4%).

Lack of service accounted for the second highest category of complaints, with 304 complaints (or 27%). Complaints within this category have increased from 189 (20%) in 2021/22 (an increase of 38%).

The third highest was delay in service at 201 (18%) received. Complaints within this category have increased from 134 (14%) in 2021/22 (an increase of 33%).

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 again within Regeneration and Environment Services, with 166 (110 in the Street Scene department and of these 85 were in Waste and Recycling) of the 304 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

**Examples of the most common complaint types recorded by this classification are as follows:**

- Quality of Service Provided
- No Service Provided/Action Taken
- Delay in Service Being Provided/Action Taken
- Quality/Standard of Work
- Missed Appointment/Service
- No response to enquiry
- Incorrect/Inaccurate written or verbal advice
- Conduct
- Application/Assessment Outcome or Decision
- Disputed Decision or Outcome
- Lack of Enforcement Action/Sufficiency of Enforcement Action
- Damage to Property
- Cost/Charge for Service
- Information and Advice
- Refusal to Provide Service/Take Action
- Appeal/Inappropriate Enforcement Action

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

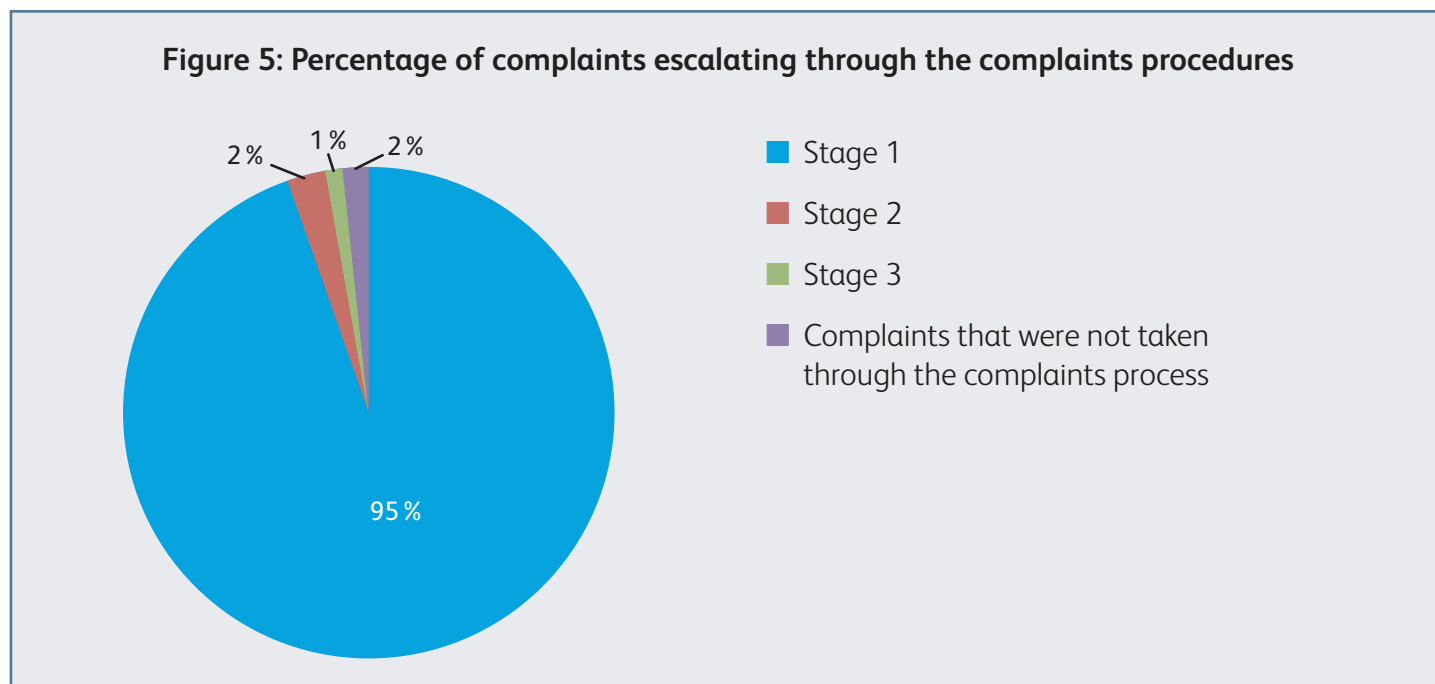
It should also be noted that slightly more complaints were upheld in terms of the percentage of complaints responded to. This is where the Council has investigated and found a problem with the service provided, with 268 or 24% upheld (235 or 26% upheld in 2020/21 and 365 or 27% upheld 2019/20) of all complaints. Sections 5 to 11 contain more detail of upheld complaints by directorate and how the Council has learnt from upheld complaints.



## 3.2 Dealing with Complaints

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

The extent to which complaints escalate through the complaints' 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 27, 2 % of all complaints, were escalated to stage 2, compared with 25, 3 %, in 2020/21).

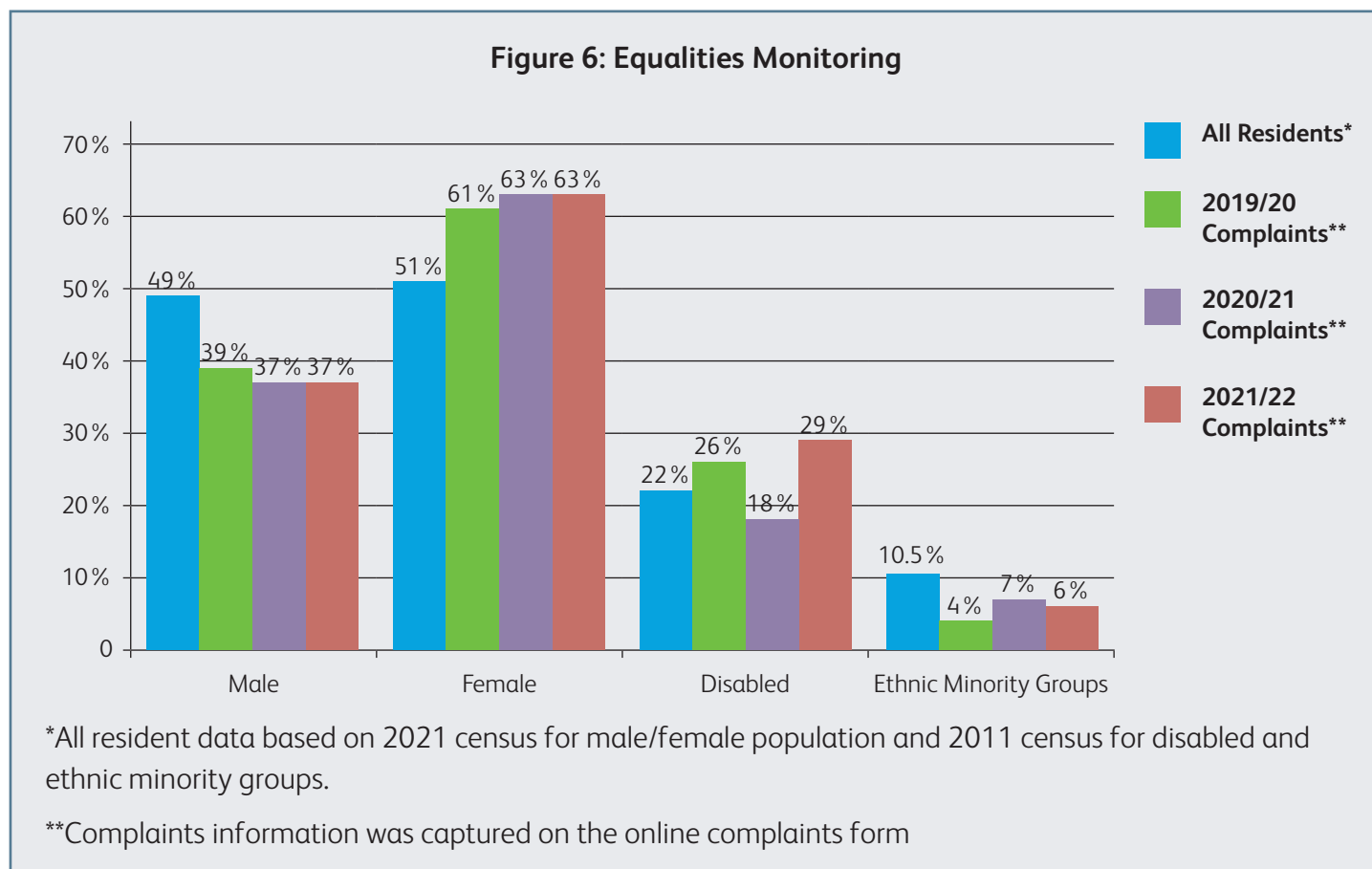


The diagram above outlines the number of complaints that reached the various stages of the complaint's procedures.

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### 3.3 Equalities Monitoring

The Council collects equalities information via its online complaint webform. This entails collecting the demographics of customers making formal complaints, as this information will be used to ensure that the complaints' process is fair and accessible for all customers.



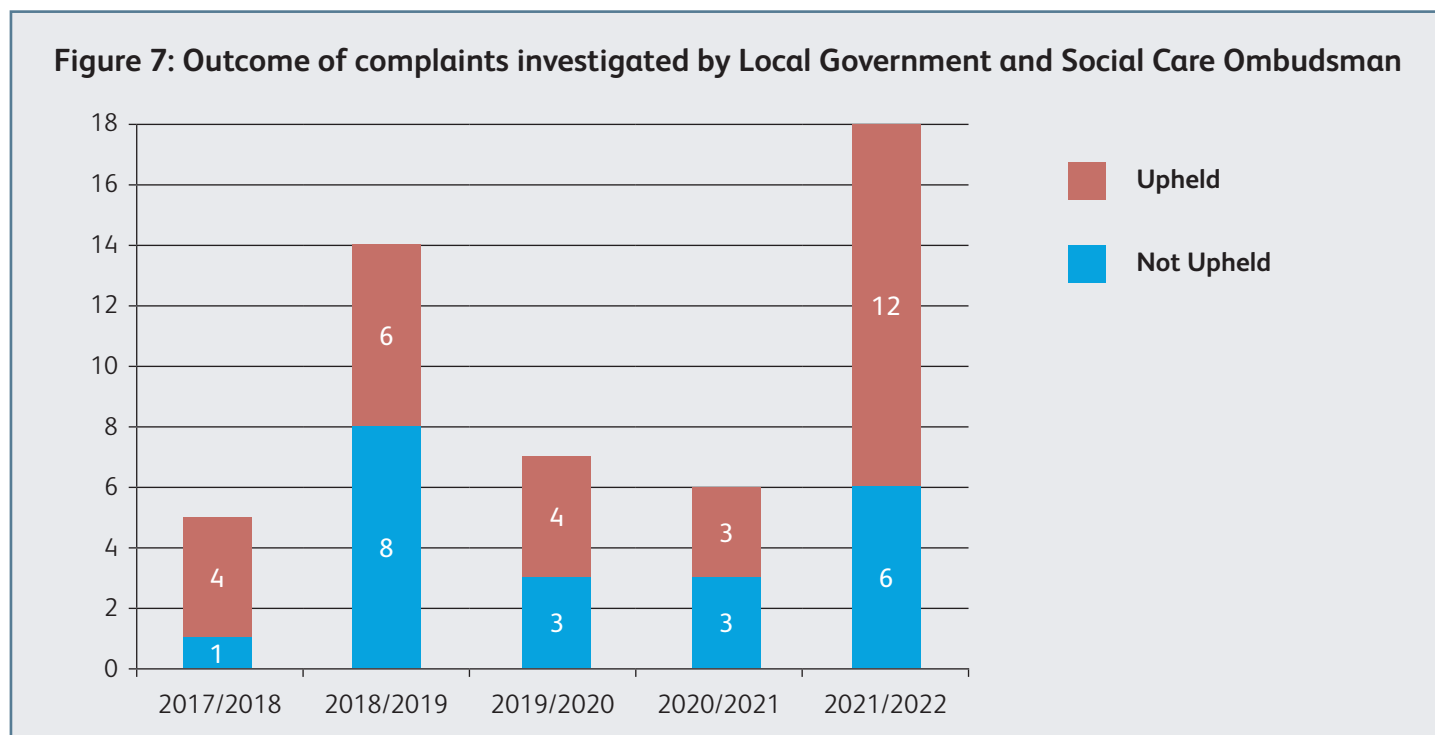
The information received indicates that significantly more female customers complained about Council services in 2021/22 and this is a consistent trend over the last three years. All directorates recorded a higher number of female complainants. For example, in Housing Services the percentage of female complainants was 71 % and Regeneration and Environment Services it was 56 %.

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

### 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). 57 complaints enquiries were directed to the LGSCO in 2021/22 (37 received in 2020/21) and of these, the LGSCO investigated 18 (Six investigated in 2020/21). This is the highest number investigated in the last five years. However, it should be noted that there was a residual effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the activities of the LGSCO in the year. As a result, they investigated more complaints due to a backlog of investigations which were built up because of a partial shutdown in 2020/21.

Figure 7 (see below) provides some context; there have been 50 complaints investigated by the LGSCO between the financial years of 2017/18 and 2020/21 with a median 5-year average of 10 per year.



In 2021/22, more complaints were investigated and more complaints were upheld by the LGSCO than in the previous year. As explained, the increase is explained in part by operational decisions made by the LGSCO due to the pandemic. However, 18 investigations compared to 1117 complaints is 2% of formal complaints received, that have escalated to the LGSCO.

12 complaints out of 18 investigations were upheld. This equates to an upheld rate of 67%, which is in line with the Ombudsman's figure of the average uphold rate of similar authorities at 68%. Four upheld complaints were in Adult Care, five were in Childrens and Young Peoples Services, one was in Housing Services and two in Regeneration and Environment Services.

Appendix 1 outlines the LGSCO decisions for the Council for 2021/22 and how these compare with 16 statistical neighbour councils. In 2021/22, the Council is in the middle quarter in terms of the numbers investigated and the numbers upheld. It ranks as 12th out of 16 of the total investigated and 11th out of 16 of those complaints that were upheld. In the previous year, 2020/21, the Council benchmarked in the upper quarter for numbers investigated and numbers upheld.

Furthermore, it shows that the majority of complaints that were brought to the LGSCO (57 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 complaint's procedures are working effectively to find fair and appropriate local resolutions.

### 3.5 Housing Ombudsman

From April 2013, the Housing Ombudsman has dealt with all complaints from tenants regarding social housing. There was only one decision made by the Housing Ombudsman in 2021/22, it was not upheld (Four decisions in 2020/21, two not upheld and two partly upheld).

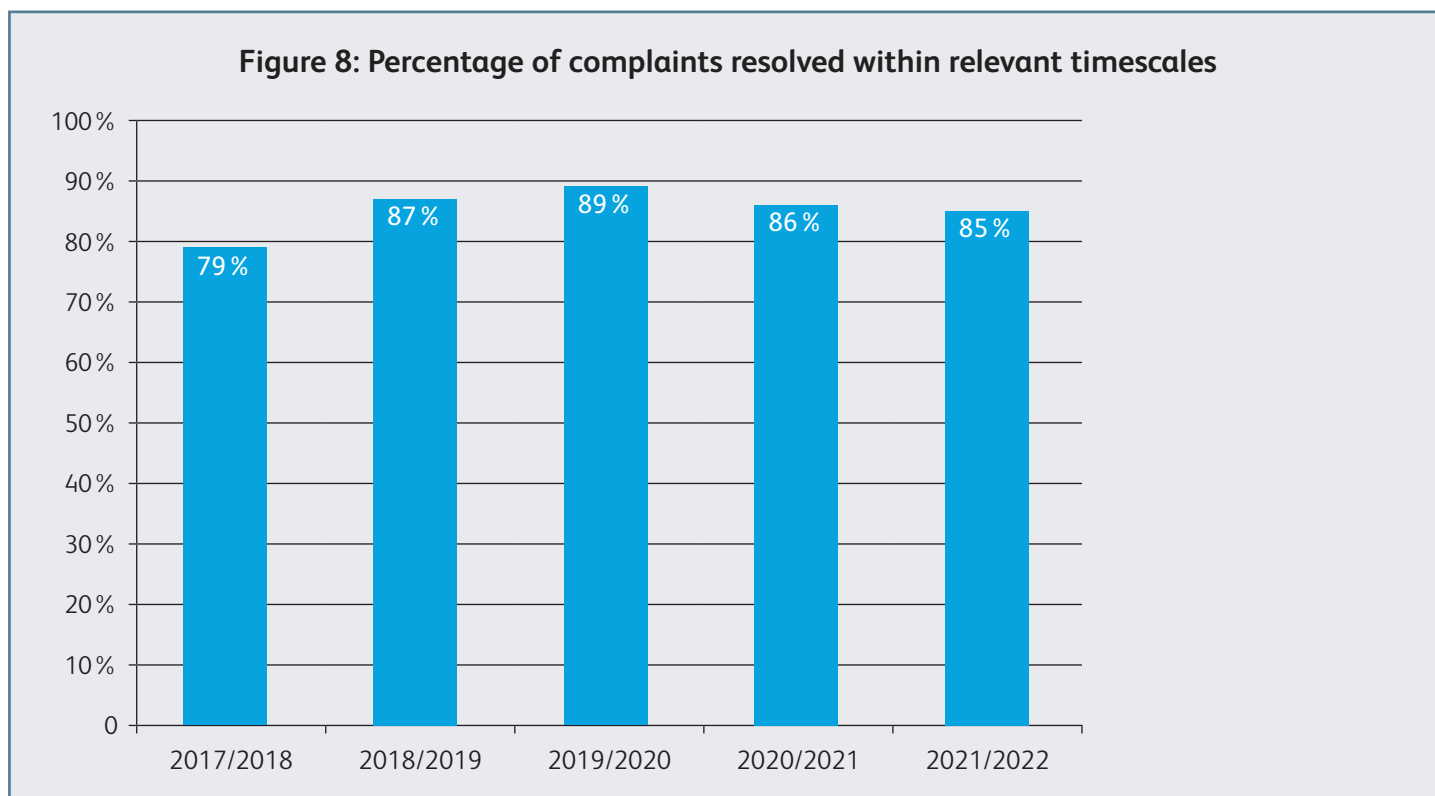
The complaint issues in this decision were regarding the timeliness of repairs to a council property and rent arrears, all six complaint points were not upheld.

# 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 85 % of complaint responses within target timescale. Although a reduction on the previous year's performance, it is in line with the 5-year average of 85 % and the Council Plan target of 85 %. 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.

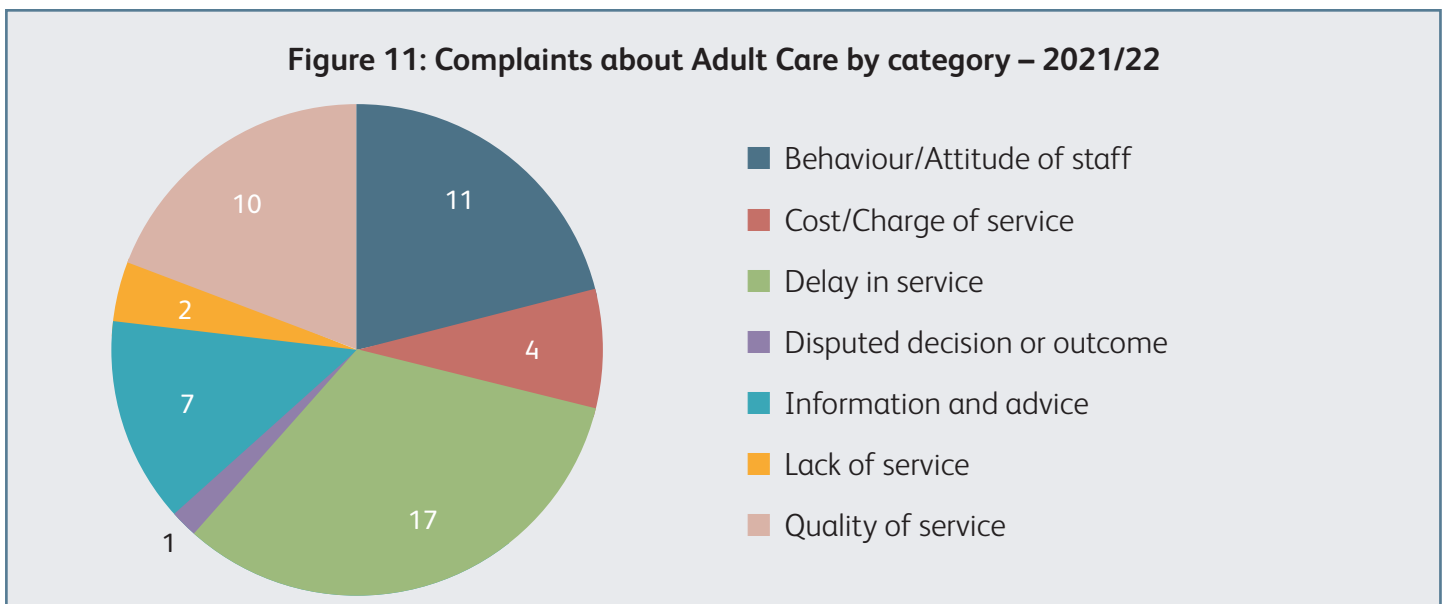
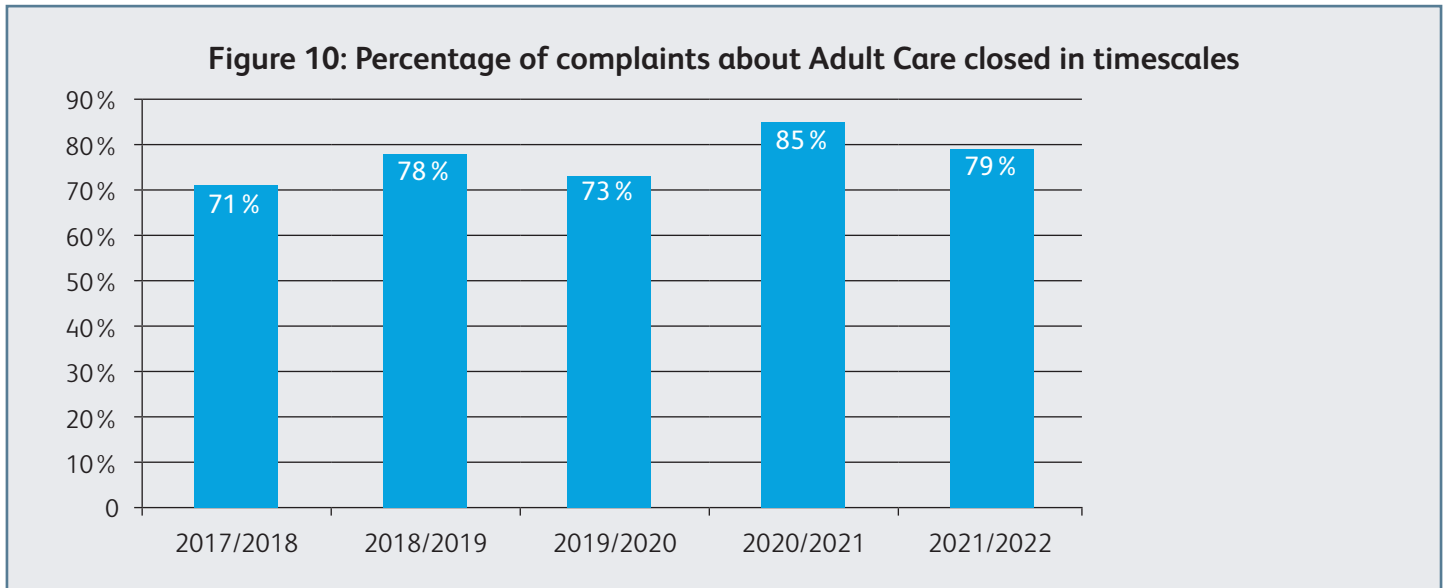
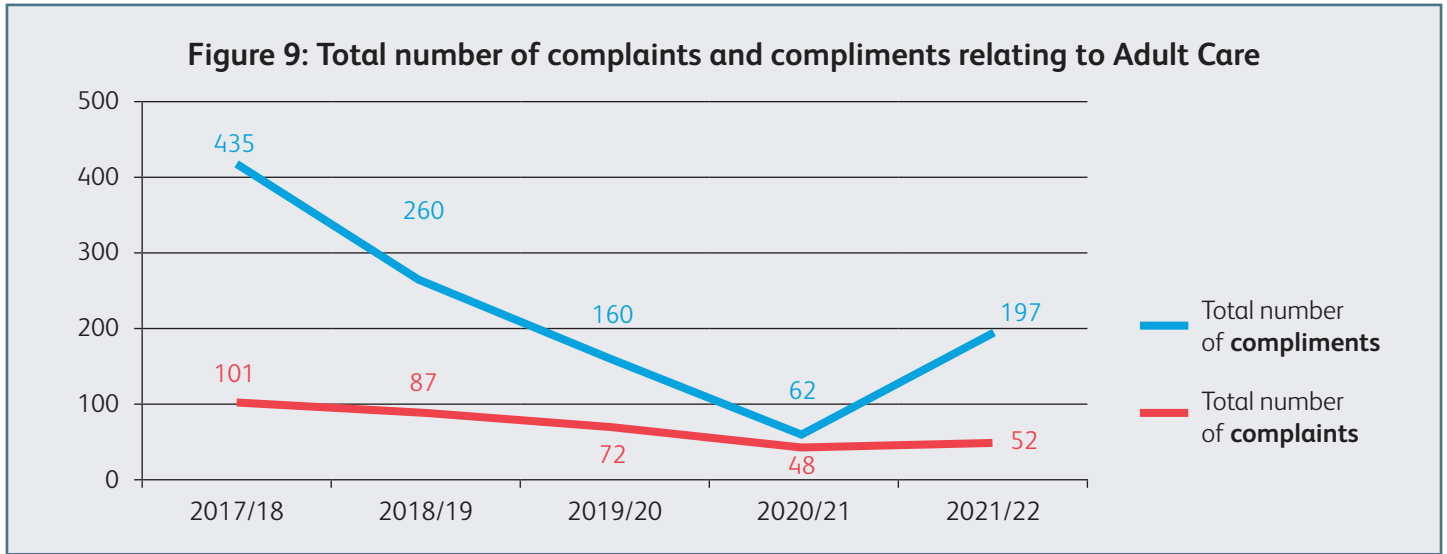
## 4.2 How we are improving

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.

# 5. ADULT CARE, HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTORATE

## 5.1 Adult Care



## 5.1.1 Key Headlines

**8%**

more  
complaints  
received

More complaints  
about Adult Care  
were received.  
**(52 in 2021/22  
compared with  
48 in 2020/21).**

**69%**

more  
compliments  
received

More compliments  
were received about  
Adult Care.  
**(197 in 2021/22  
compared with  
62 in 2020/21).**



**The same number  
of complaints  
were upheld.**

(14 in 2021/22  
compared with  
14 in 2020/21).

**79% of complaints were  
responded to within  
timescales.**

Compared with 85 %  
in 2020/21.



**Six Ombudsman  
complaint decisions  
were received.**

Four were upheld. One  
decision, not upheld,  
received in 2020/21.

**17 of 52** complaints  
were regarding **delay  
in service** and **11** were  
regarding **information  
and advice.**



### **Prevalent themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for Adult Care complaints were:**

- Delays in assessments / reviews / request for contact
- Cost or charges for care
- Lack of information or advice / communication
- Behaviour / Attitude of staff

In addition, the increase in formal complaints of 8% is lower than the all Council increase of 17%. The largest change in complaints received was in Safeguarding and MCA/DoLS Service, but this was a decrease of five complaints from six to one. Four services increased the numbers received and three remained the same. The largest increases were in Access, Locality Social Work and Community Occupational Therapy Services, with each receiving three more complaints. Provider Services, Commissioning and Finance Services remained the same and did not see an increase in complaints received.

However, the number of complaints investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman increased significantly. From one in 2020/21 to six in 2021/22, which is an 83% increase, and four were upheld. This is against the usual trend seen in Adult Care in terms of complaints received and in general terms was a result of the pressures the service experienced due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Ombudsman enquiries were generally regarding issues occurring in 2020. This trend has not been continued into 2022/23.

### **Examples of some of the compliments received for Adult Care in 2021/22:**

Compliment for the My Front Door Team. Customer shared how they had been treated positively throughout the whole process and sudden issues followed up promptly.

Compliment for the Integrated Discharge Team. "Has worked to find the best care solution .....their help has been invaluable, and she has been a great source of support"

Compliment for Locality Social Work Team "I would like to show my recognition to the Social Worker for doing a fantastic speedy job under these difficult circumstances. What an outstanding job you have done and the difference to our lives you have made"

Compliment for Customer Contact Team "Thank you so much for our telephone conversation this morning. It was really helpful and very supportive. We're currently going through a rather stressful time, so your kindness was very much appreciated and reassuring."

## **5.1.2 Lessons Learned**

**Adult Care made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2021/22. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:**

### **The Complaint**

A customer expressed concerns about the funding of family member's care following discharge from hospital and a delay in responding to their enquiries

### **What did we do?**

The Council carefully considered the customers complaint and accepted that the service and advice provided was not as good as it could be. It agreed to the following actions to improve the service provided.

The service held regular meetings with both team managers and staff to discuss case work and implemented case file audits to ensure that all staff are accurately recording conversations as well as ensuring the information given is also correct at the time of the assessment.

The complaint will be used to improve the way staff engage and interact with families and ensure any appropriate training is attended to support this.

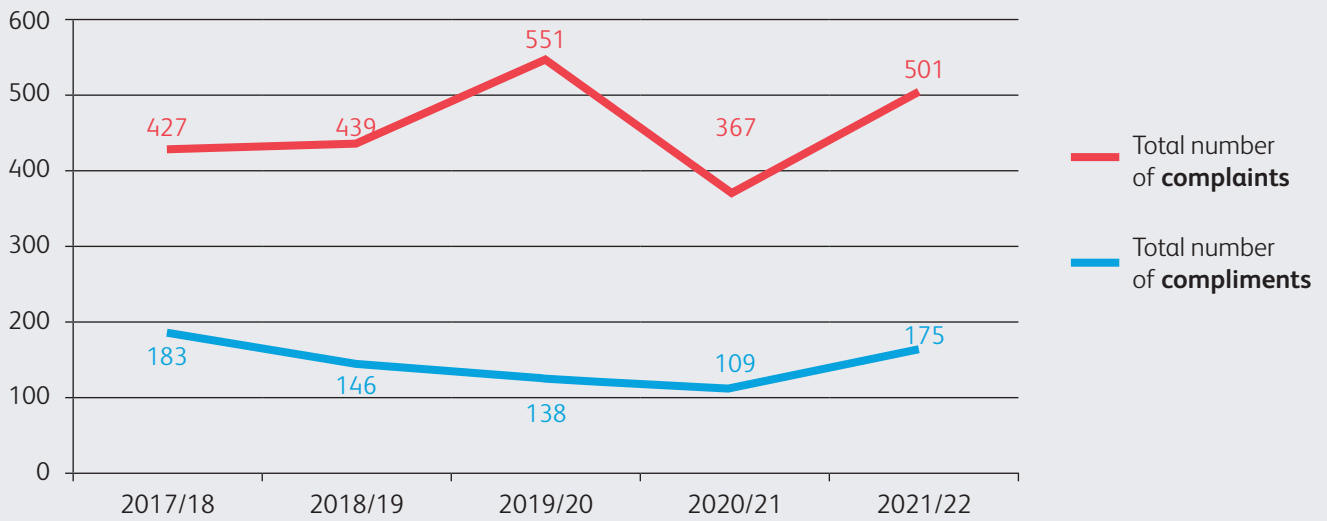
### **Who is better off?**

Improvements to the way that the Council's Integrated Discharge Team (Hospital Social Work Team) records and provides this type of complex advice to customers often in difficult circumstances will benefit all current and future users of Adult Care in Rotherham. Through clear advice that has been more accurately recorded, the Council will ensure that problems experienced in this complaint will not reoccur and that services have been improved for all residents.

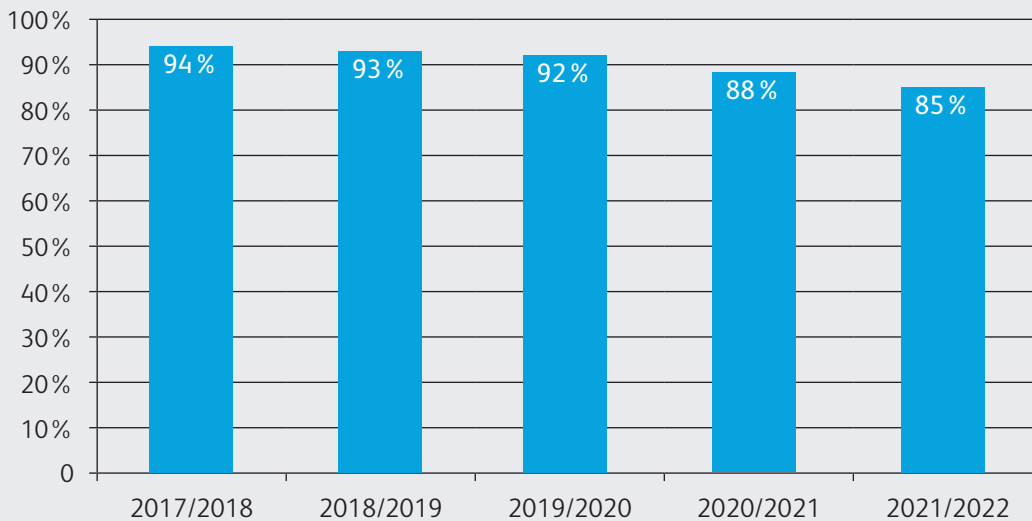


## 5.2 Housing Services

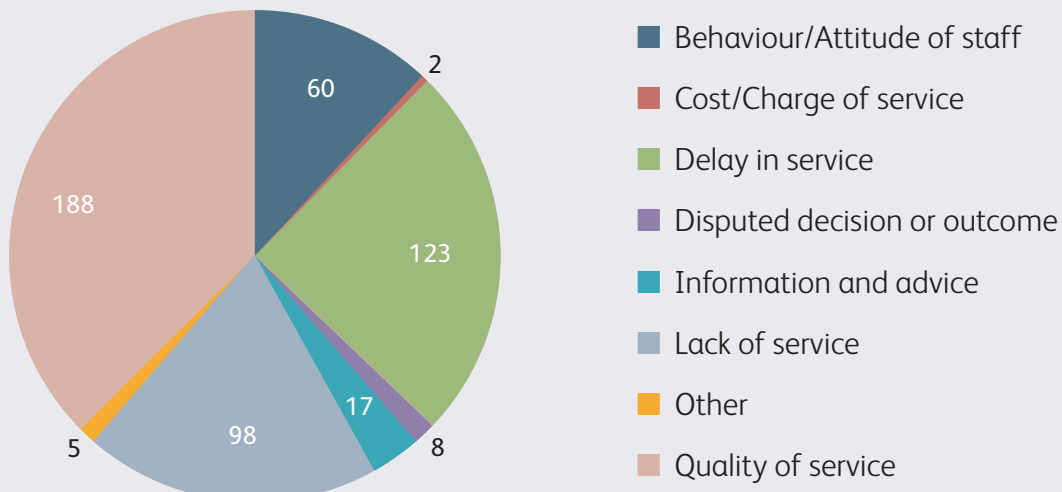
**Figure 12: Total number of complaints and compliments about Housing Services**



**Figure 13: Percentage of complaints about Housing Services closed within timescales**



**Figure 14: Complaints about Housing Services by category – 2021/22**



## 5.2.1 Key Headlines

# 27%

more complaints received

More complaints about Housing Services were received.

**(501 in 2021/22 compared with 367 in 2020/21).**

More compliments were received about Housing Services.

**(175 in 2021/22 compared with 109 in 2020/21).**

# 38%

more compliments received



**Fewer complaints were upheld.**

(135, 27%, in 2021/22 compared with 84, 23%, in 2020/21).

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

This meets the Council Plan target of 85% but is lower than 2020/21, 88%.



Two Ombudsman complaint decisions were received.

**One was upheld and one was not upheld.**

**313 complaints were regarding quality of service** and 304 complaints were regarding lack of service.



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

- With the exception of the Business and Commercial service (this service includes rent collection), all services saw an increase in the number of complaints received. This was partly to be expected following a return of non-emergency services, which were much reduced in the first year of the pandemic. The total number of complaints remain down on those received before the pandemic in 2019/20.
- As in previous years communication remains the main cause of complaints particularly in relation to individual repair issues where customer expectation could be managed better.
- Delays in service combined with lack of service, was the single highest reason for complaints being upheld across most services. This includes missed appointments and delays caused by national shortages of materials.

### Examples of some of the compliments received for housing services in 2021/22:

“I would also like to thank all your workmen from the inspector, scaffolders, skip company, the gas fitter, the roofers, drivers and anyone else I have missed. Your team have treated my property like their own and have been Covid Secure. They have all been polite, friendly and have worked around me. My garden has been left tidy and their workspace has always been swept clean and made safe at the end of their working day...  
...I have never seen a group of workmen so focussed and hard-working!!”

“I’ve never seen a team work so hard. I was really impressed with how compassionate they were to the situation”.

“Thank you for all the help and support these three amazing ladies, xxx, xxx and xxx have given my family over the last few months. We have had the worst time ever and hated being at home. I did not think anyone would help and only think ‘its kids being kids’, but they did not. xxx is now so happy at school and at home goes out with friends she has made since we moved and is back to being a happy content little girl. All the other children are much happier now as well. It really has given us a better quality of life and for that I cannot thank these three ladies and everyone else enough for all their time, help and support”

## 5.2.2 Lessons Learned

**Housing Services made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2021/22. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:**

### The Complaint

A customer reported their boiler had failed during a bank holiday weekend, the boiler was still under warranty and the process is that the subcontractor should return and repair a boiler under warranty. It is rare for new boilers to break down, unfortunately in this case the subcontractor could not be contacted, and the customer experienced an unacceptable delay before the boiler was repaired.

### What did we do?

An apology was given, boiler repaired, and the procedure changed to prevent such a delay happening again. In the rare instances where a boiler under warranty breaks down and the subcontractor is uncontactable, or the issue becomes an emergency, a job is raised for the council’s repair contractor to attend.

A similar issue was also experienced with an under warranty Disabled Facility Grant funded level access shower. As a result of the complaint the process for this situation has been amended and contract partners instructed in an emergency situation, rather than waiting for the manufacturers to attend under warranty, to replace the shower if the tenant is in immediate need and there is no other form of bathing.

### Who is better off?

The response to similar future incidents will be prompt and avoid delays for vulnerable customers.

## 5.3 Public Health

It is a statutory requirement to report annually on the complaints received for Public Health services. Please note that the Public Health team predominantly 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.

### 5.3.1 Key Headlines

- Two complaints were received. (Three in 2020/21)
- Nine compliments were recorded. (0 in 2020/21)
- 0 complaints were upheld. (Two upheld in 2020/21)
- No complaints were investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- 100% of complaints were resolved within statutory timescales. (100%, three out of three in 2020/21)

### 5.3.2 Complaints

The subject matter of each complaint received is listed below:

- Unhappy with the behaviour of two men who came to their property regarding track and trace.
- Complaint about the level of support offered by Council during isolation/shielding.

### 5.3.3 Compliments

Examples include:

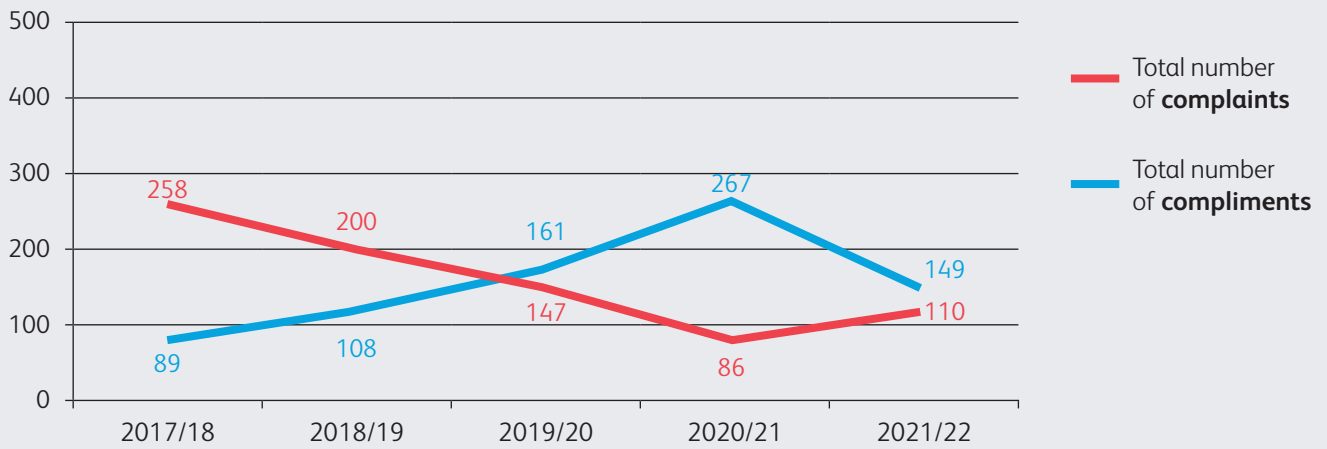
“Brilliant. Very informative...Spot on that! Useful overview on its capabilities and uses, thanks for a superb session guys, thanks very much for sharing. Fantastic session guys. Many thanks for all the knowledge.”

“Thank you, all. That was extremely helpful and informative.”

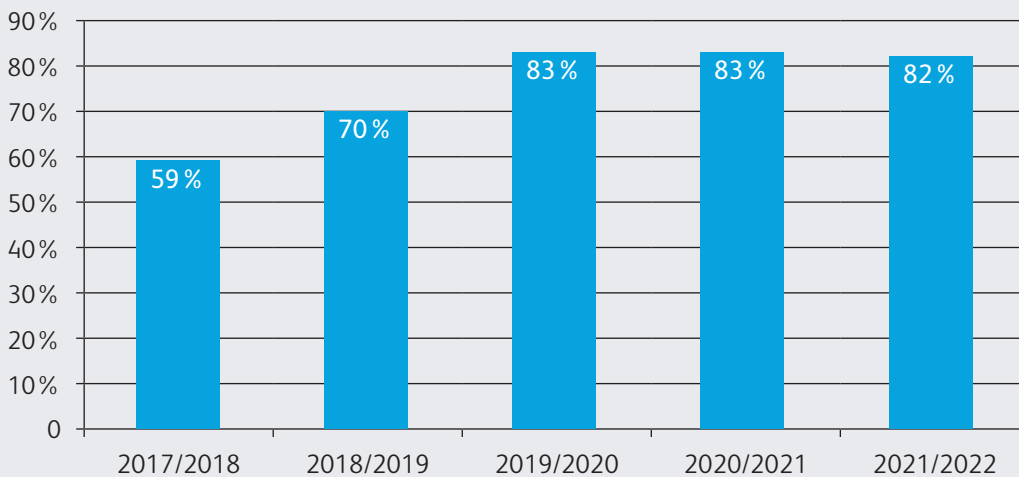
“A big congratulations and many thanks for such an awesome session this afternoon! I have no idea how you managed to fit so much, clear, and relevant content into such a short space of time, but it was truly impressive!”

# 6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE

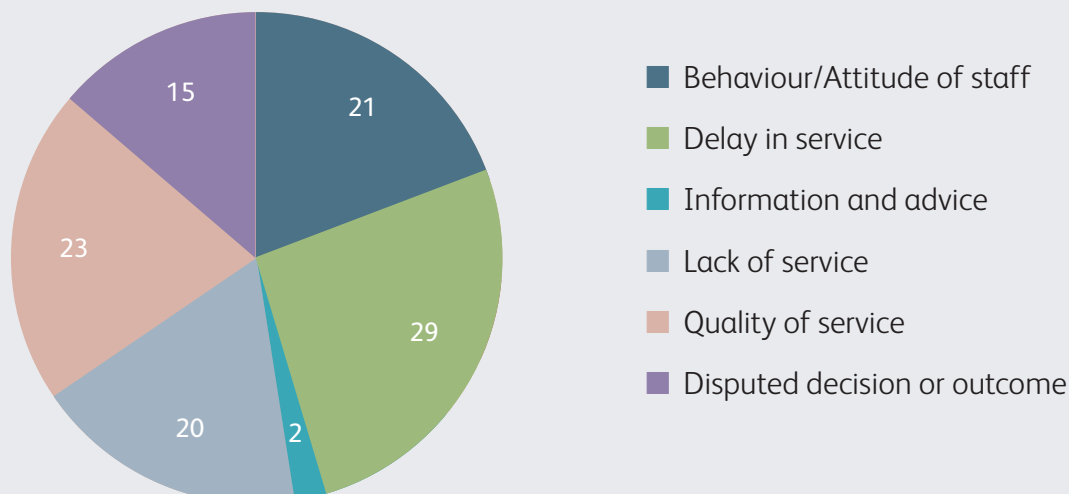
**Figure 15: Total number of complaints and compliments about Children and Young People's Services**



**Figure 16: Percentage of complaints about Children and Young People's Services closed within timescales**



**Figure 17: Complaints about Children and Young People's Services by category – 2021/22**



## 6.1 Key Headlines

# 28%

more  
complaints  
received

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

**(110 in 2021/22 compared with 86 in 2020/21).**

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

**(149 in 2021/22 compared with 267 in 2020/21).**

# 44%

fewer  
compliments  
received



**More complaints were upheld.**

(57 in 2021/22 compared with 45 in 2020/21).

**82% of complaints were responded to within timescales.**

This is slightly less than 2020/21 but consistent.



Five Ombudsman complaint decisions were received.

**All were upheld.**

Four decisions were received in 2020/21.

**Most complaints were regarding delay in service, 29 of 110.**

Followed by quality of service, 23 of 110.



### 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 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 2021/22:**

"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 2021/22 following the feedback from customers. An example of this 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 an Education Health Care Plan and the how it had monitored the quality of the independent specialist provision.

### **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.

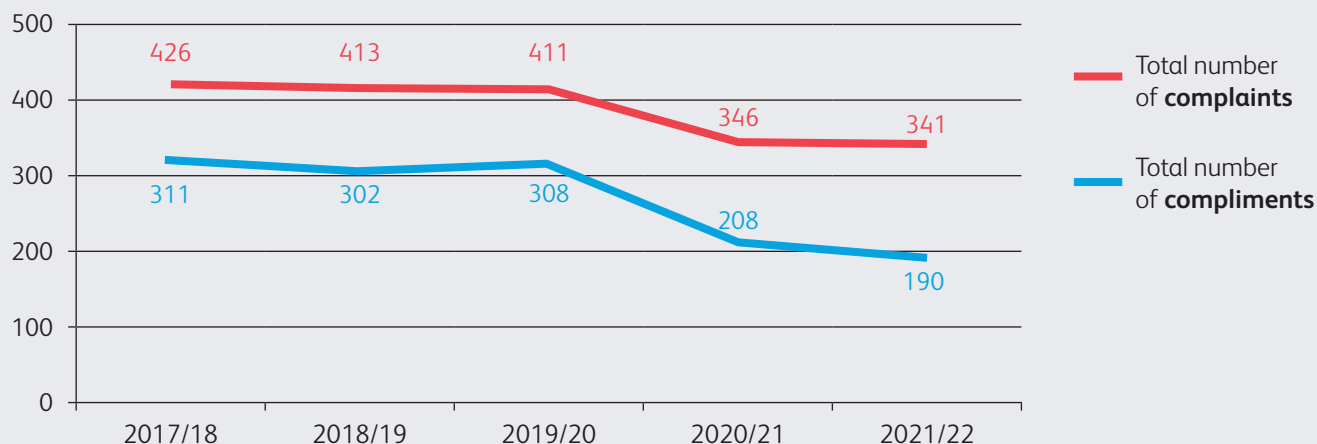
- The team have developed the role of assistant EHC Coordinators within the team to provide 'front door' assessment of reviews received by the team. This ensures that reviews are initially considered, and decision letters sent out to families within statutory timelines.
- The team now has a designated SEN Reviewing Officer who has oversight of the review process and is a senior post within the team.
- The Reviewing Officer links with the commissioning team on a weekly basis to consider the current position for learners placed in out of authority schools.
- The Reviewing Officer has undertaken individual quality assurance

### **Who is better off?**

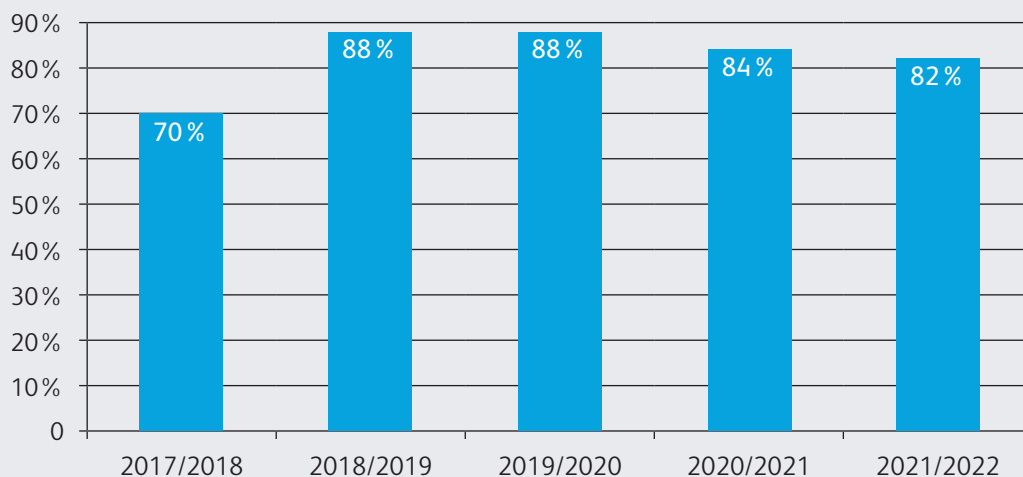
Through these improvements to the Council's Education Health Care Plan review process the Council will ensure that problems experienced in this complaint will not reoccur and that services have been improved for all residents.

# 7. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

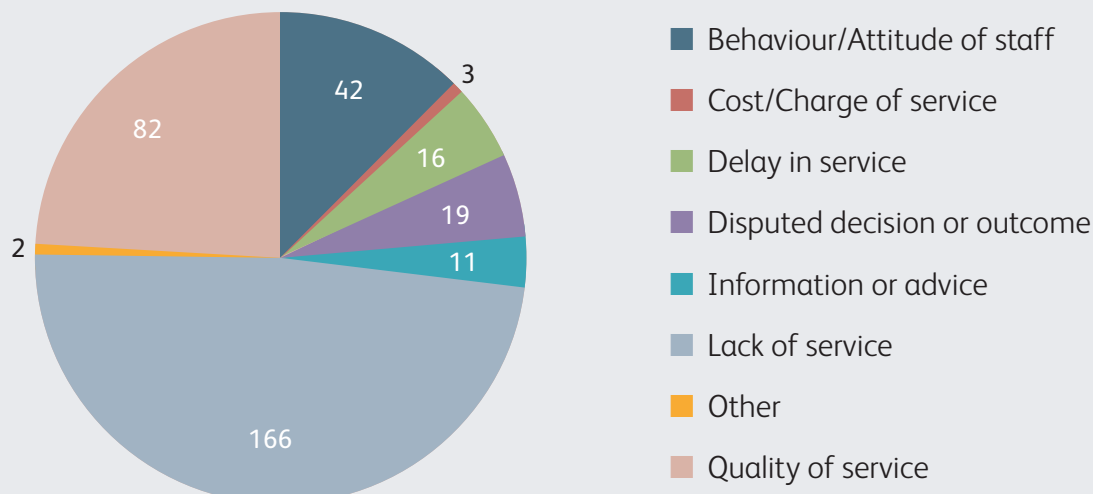
**Figure 18: Total number of compliments and complaints about Regeneration and Environment**



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



**Figure 20: Complaints about Regeneration and Environment by category – 2021/22**





## 7.1 Key Headlines

1%

fewer complaints received

Fewer complaints about Regeneration and Environment were received.

**(341 in 2021/22 compared with 346 in 2020/21).**

Fewer compliments were received about Regeneration and Environment.

**(190 in 2021/22 compared with 208 in 2020/21).**

8%

fewer compliments received



**Fewer complaints were upheld.**

(73 in 2021/22 compared with 113 in 2020/21).

**Fewer complaints responded to within timescales.**

(82% in 2021/22 compared with 88% in 2020/21).



Six Ombudsman complaint decisions were received.

**Two were upheld and Four were not upheld.**

Two received in 2020/21.

**49% of complaints were regarding lack of service (166 of 341 complaints).**

82 complaints were regarding the quality of service.



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

- Missed bin collections and complaints about bins not being returned to the correction location.
- Lack of enforcement action in respect of Environmental Health.
- Lack of maintenance of Trees following issues being reported to the Council.
- Planning decisions, planning process and lack of planning enforcement action.
- Conduct and attitude of waste collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance operatives.

In addition, the number of complaints decreased only slightly on previous years. The largest number of complaints were regarding domestic waste and recycling collections in the Waste Management service, with 143 received. In context, the next highest numbers of complaints received were 26 in Regulation and Enforcement, 25 in Planning and Building Control and 19 in Trees Service.

### **Examples of some of the compliments received for Regeneration and Environment in 2021/22:**

“We wish to thank your operatives today on another smashing grass cutting job and can you please pass on our thanks to the chap who found some car keys. They have been safely passed to their owners.”

“Brilliant. Many thanks for your help. You are always very helpful and polite and a credit to the licensing department . You always go above and beyond when helping customers.”

“The Grounds Maintenance Team were not only working hard but doing a great job and the area was looking wonderful and we appreciated the work and effort they were putting in.”

“You were both fantastic and couldn’t have been more thoughtful and helpful. She is extremely grateful for your help in getting everything sorted and everything has been running smoothly since.”

## **7.2 Lessons Learned**

**Regeneration and Environment made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2021/22. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:**

### **The Complaint**

A complaint was received regarding correspondence relating to re-subscription to the garden waste collection service which had been addressed incorrectly to persons who had previously subscribed to the service but no longer resided at the property.

### **What did we do?**

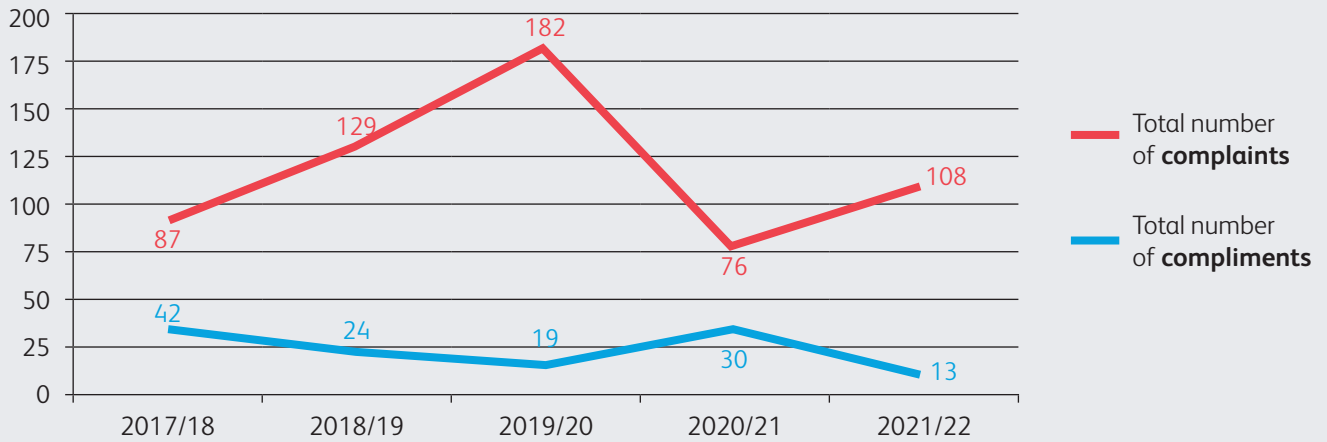
We have reviewed the process for processing the data collected from subscriptions to the garden waste collection service. When this is to be used for the purposes of corresponding with subscribers we have introduced additional steps to check the accuracy of the data and all future correspondence is addressed to the occupier.

### **Who is better off?**

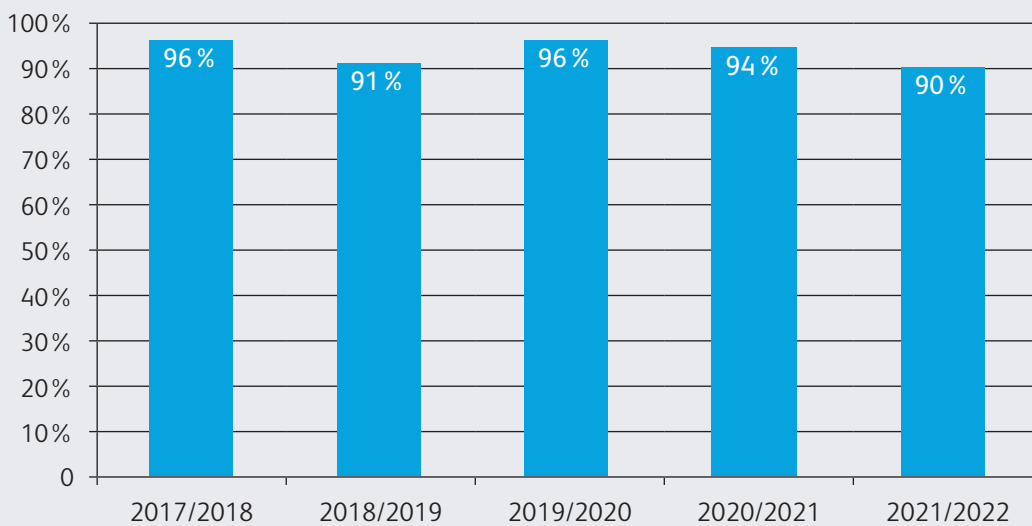
Customer’s data is more secure and there is less opportunity for incorrectly addressed correspondence to cause distress and inconvenience to customers.

# 8. FINANCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES DIRECTORATE

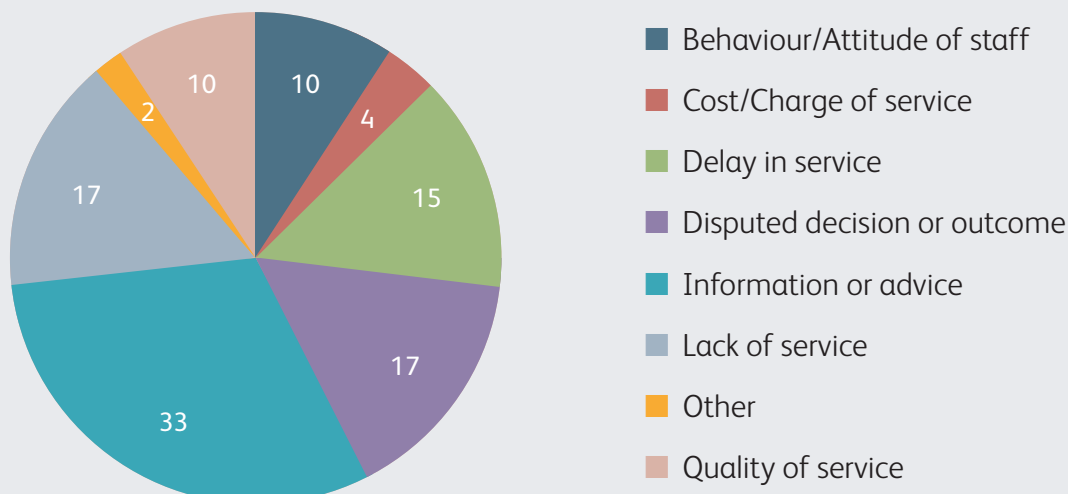
**Figure 21: Total number of complaints and compliments about Finance and Customer Services**



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



**23: Complaints about Finance and Customer Services by category – 2021/22**



## 8.1 Key Headlines

# 30%

more  
complaints  
received

Fewer complaints about Finance and Customer Services were received.

**(108 in 2021/22 compared with 76 in 2020/21).**

Fewer compliments were received about Finance and Customer Services.

**(13 in 2021/22 compared with 30 in 2020/21.)**

# 57%

fewer  
compliments  
received



**More complaints were upheld.**

(19 in 2021/22 compared with 10 in 2020/21).

**90% of complaints were responded to within timescales.**

This is above the Council Plan target of 85% and is higher than the performance in 2020/21, 89%.



No Ombudsman complaint decisions were received.

**30% of complaints were regarding information and advice** (32 out of 106) **and 16% lack of service** (17 out of 106).



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

- Inaccuracy of advice and information provided by Customer Service Advisors in relation to council home repairs and bin collections.
- Inaccurate advice and lack of information provided regarding council tax, housing benefit and Council Tax Support.
- Lack of response to enquiries regarding Blue Badge and delay in processing application.

The directorate saw a significant decrease in the number of complaints received in previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and whilst there has been an increase in the number of complaints received in this year; this still compares favourably with pre-pandemic numbers of complaints which were significantly higher.

Whilst the above themes have been highlighted, it should be noted that the numbers of complaints upheld in relation to these themes are not significant. Where in previous years call waiting times and delays in the blue badge application process had been significant themes; these two issues have not been reflected significantly in the complaints received in this year. This is despite an increase of 42% in the number of complaints about Customer Services from 19 to 33.

In addition, complaints in relation to Council Tax have increased by 17% from the previous year. This in part continues to reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the additional financial support being provided to customers and businesses which led to some complaints being received.

In addition, a further seven complaints were received in relation to Registration and Bereavement Services which had not previously been part of this directorate.

#### **Examples of some of the compliments received for Finance and Customer Services in 2021/22:**

“Throughout the pandemic I have had to deal with various departments of Rotherham MBC on a regular basis and have found the service from every department, exemplary”.

“She was lovely and explained everything fully to me and left me feeling happy that things would be sorted out.....she was professional and took the time to go through things and also have a laugh. Positive experience needs recognising”

“I’m writing to express our sincere appreciation of, and gratitude for, the assistance provided to us in managing my mother’s care financing. Since our initial contact over a year ago she has provided sound advice, support and understanding and continues to do so in the most kindly, courteous, efficient and professional manner. It’s extremely rare these days to receive such a service, she is a most remarkable Officer and a great asset to your Council.”

## **8.2 Lessons Learned**

**Finance and Customer Services made several service improvements in 2021/22 following the feedback from customers. An example of these is outlined in the case study below:**

### **The Complaint**

A customer complained about a delay in receiving a new Rothercard and that nobody had responded to her enquiries when she had contacted the Council about this issue.

### **What did we do?**

We have now ensured that all relevant staff have access to the Rothercard e-mail mailbox to be able to deal with enquiries as soon as they are received. In addition, staff carry out weekly checks of the mailbox to ensure and that all enquiries have been responded to and any enquiries that have not received a response are referred to a Team Leader to be addressed promptly.

### **Who is better off?**

There are no longer delays in responding to enquiries regarding Rothercard applications and systems in place to ensure that all enquiries receive a response. This has led to no further complaints being received regarding this service in 2021/22.

## 9. 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 (except for the Neighbourhoods Team) 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 2021/22 is provided in summary below.**

### 10.1 Key Headlines

- Three complaints were received (Five in 2020/21).
- 27 compliments were recorded (19 in 2020/21).
- All three were stage 1 complaints. No stage 2 complaints.
- Three complaints were upheld (One upheld in 2020/21).
- One Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decision (closed after initial enquiries).
- 100% of complaints were resolved within statutory timescales (100%, in 2020/21).

### 10.2 Complaints

The subject matter of each complaint received is listed below:

#### Communications

- A resident was unhappy with the delay in response to their enquiries in respect to the filming of a council meeting.

#### Human Resources

- Two complaints were received about the same issue. Complainants were unhappy with the action taken to recover an overpayment .

### 10.3 Compliments

Examples include:

“Thank you for all your help in dealing with my Covid Winter Hardship payment, it is really appreciated”

“I think Rotherham did an amazing job at looking after the tenants/ residents who were clinically extremely Vulnerable.”

“He guided me through each stage and was reassuring throughout the process. He couldn't be more professional or helpful. What an absolute asset he is to your team. I can't thank him enough.”

## 10. NEXT STEPS 2022/23

During 2021/22 the numbers of complaints increased demonstrating the challenges facing the council and the pressures on the delivery of services, as services normalised followed the pandemic.

The need to provide excellent customer services that are efficient and cost effective is fundamental to the management of the council. 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 2022/23 to ensure that the way the Council deals with complaints and responds to customer feedback continues to improve.

In addition, changes to the regulation of Housing Services (The Charter for Social Housing Residents), the introduction of Tenant Satisfaction Measures by the Regulator of Social Housing and a revised Housing Ombudsman code has also informed our ongoing improvement actions.

### **Key actions included:**

- Complaints Team self-assessment completed every 12 months to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- Stage 2 complaints for Housing Services (Landlord Function) will be responded to in four weeks (previously five weeks).
- Complaint satisfaction survey to be introduced for all complaints.
- Learning from complaints meeting introduced in Housing Services. With trends from complaints analysed and learning and service improvements tracked to completion.
- New Housing Services complaint web page to include better information for tenants, including learning from complaints case studies and satisfaction information.
- 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 better learning from complaints programme. That all learning reported is considered and the impact of service improvement is understood and recorded.
- Ensure remedy requests by the Ombudsman are completed within required timescales and that senior managers are involved at all stages of the enquiry process, including a revised sign off process.
- Complaints Team will work with Council departments to check to see if there is anything more that can be done to resolve a complaint after notification of Ombudsman investigation is received.
- Work to improve performance to complaint procedure timescales.
- 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 2021/22, 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
Halton Borough Council	2	2	8	12	4	2	6	30	33%	64%
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council	2	2	24	23	2	5	7	58	71%	68%
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council	5	13	12	14	6	2	8	52	25%	68%
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	4	1	15	17	3	6	9	46	67%	68%
Telford & Wrekin Council	4	1	5	17	3	8	11	38	73%	64%
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council	2	1	7	14	8	5	13	37	38%	64%
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	0	0	8	15	4	9	13	36	69%	68%
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council	1	0	17	10	2	11	13	41	85%	68%
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	6	4	23	30	2	12	14	77	86%	64%
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	4	3	11	30	6	11	17	65	65%	68%
<b>Rotherham Council</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>68%</b>
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council	2	1	10	12	5	13	18	43	72%	68%
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	6	9	23	27	7	14	21	86	67%	68%
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council	2	3	21	32	4	17	21	79	81%	68%
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council	1	4	19	23	8	14	22	69	64%	68%
Wakefield City Council	4	6	21	30	10	13	23	84	57%	68%



