

ANNUAL REPORT COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023



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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 the Council 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 Council can then also use the information gathered from the record of formal complaints to consider how it delivers services. The Council is able to analyse trends using this information and find learning and service improvements. This can then be used to improve customer care and make changes, where necessary, to our policy and procedures.

The number of complaints received is at its highest recorded level. In 2022/23, the number is back to a level that is just above the numbers received in 2019/20 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic had the effect of suppressing complaint numbers between 2020 and 2022.

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 via our learning from complaints process (see sections five to nine of the report). 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 2022-31st March 2023, 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 2022/23.

In addition to this annual report, the Council's complaints data features throughout the Council's Performance Management Framework from the Council Plan through to frontline teams. Complaints information is included within service level performance reports and is considered and triangulated alongside other key performance indicators by Performance Officers, senior managers, and service leaders to inform service and process improvements. The Complaints Manager also attends Directorate Leadership teams to ensure there is strategic oversight and holds specific Lessons Learnt workshops, so staff understand and take preventative action to avoid further issues.

Furthermore, building on the key developments in 2022/23, 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 outcome of our self-assessments completed to be in line with the Housing Ombudsman's and now the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint handling code. This will include a review of all written communication, the Complaints Policy and response timescales.

- 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. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities has taken place and their best practice approaches will be used to further increase the numbers of compliments received.
- Continue to train front line staff and managers in respect of the formal complaints process and best practice when responding to customer complaints.

2. KEY HEADLINES – 2022/23

1,397
complaints
received

1,397 complaints were received.
(compared with 1,117 in 2021/22, this is an increase of 25%.)

791 compliments were received.
(compared with 752 in 2021/22, this is a 5% increase.)



More complaints were upheld.
(443 or 32% were upheld in 2022/23 compared to 268 or 24% in 2021/22.)

The same proportion of complaints were responded to within timescales.
(85% in 2022/23 compared with 85% in 2021/22.)



Seven complaints were investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman.
This is a 61% reduction from 2021/22 where 18 were investigated.

More complaints were received regarding the quality of service.
(431 compared to 313 in 2022/21. This is a 38% increase.)



More complaints regarding the behaviour and attitude of staff.
(168 compared with 145 in 2021/22, this is a 16% increase.)

More complaints were responded to in time by:
Housing Services up to 87% from 85%.
R&E up to 84% from 82%.
Finance and Customer Service maintained 90%.



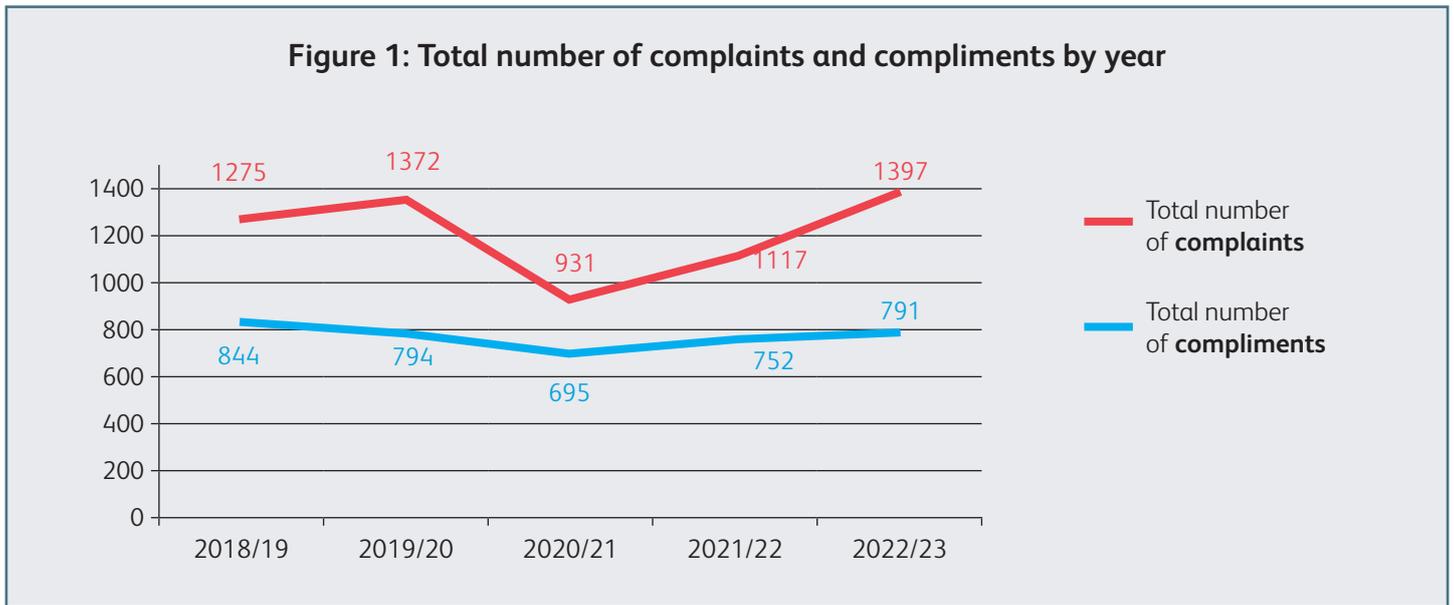
Fewer Complaints were responded to in time by:
Adult Services (78% from 79%).
CYPS (64% from 82%).

Fewer escalations through the complaint procedure.
(24 or 2% were escalated to stage two compared to 32 or 3% in 2021/22.)



3. OVERVIEW

3.1 Summary



In 2022/23, the overall number of complaints received by the Council increased by 25%, going from 1,117 in 2021/22 to 1397. However, whilst this is a significant increase compared to the previous year, it is only a 2% increase on the number received in 2019/20 prior to the pandemic. It is also important to note that in the first three months of 2023/24 291 complaints were received compared to 340 in the same period in 2022/23, which is a 17% decrease.

The Council provides a wide variety of services to over 266,200 residents. In this context, 1397 complaints are only a fraction of the number of customer interactions occurring each year. For example, the Council received 1,172,612 new web visitors in 2022/23.

The number of compliments recorded by the Council also increased, from 752 in 2021/22 to 791 (an increase of 5%). It is good to see that the numbers have increased again year on year. Continued 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 they make sure 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. A breakdown on the numbers received and how much they changed, by department is as follows:

- The largest increase was in Regeneration and Environment from 341 to 510, an increase of 50%.
- The second largest increase was in Housing services from 501 to 607, a percentage increase of 21%.
- Showing small increases were Adult Care services from 52 to 55, a percentage increase of 6% Children and Young Peoples Services from 110 to 116, a percentage increase of 5% and Assistant Chief Executives from three to four complaints received.
- Against this trend Finance and Customer Services saw a small decrease in the number of complaints received from 108 to 105 and Public Health decreased from two to zero.

The following diagrams (Figure's 2 and 3) show the breakdown of complaints and compliments by Directorate in 2021/22 and 2022/23.

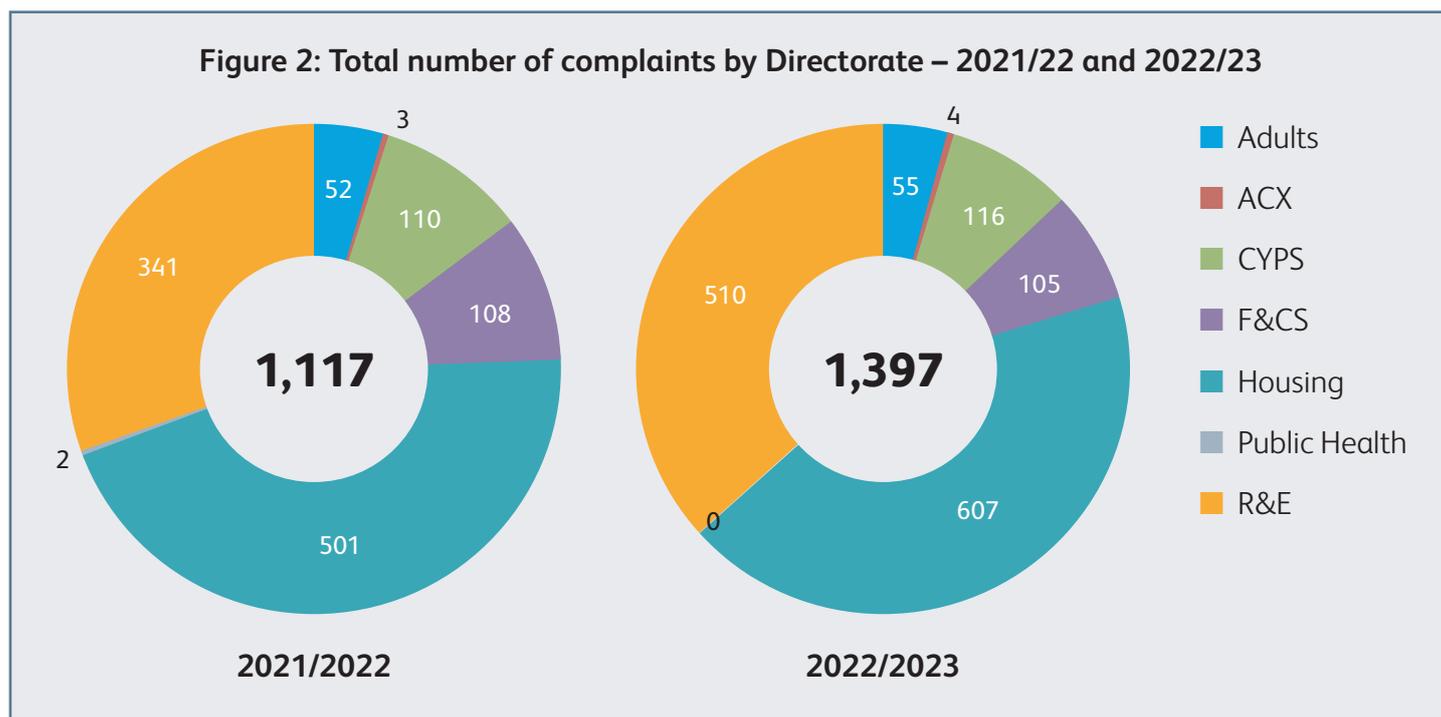


Figure 2 shows that the two highest areas for complaints were Housing Services and Regeneration and Environment. This is consistent with previous years' figures, as these areas typically receive the highest volume of complaints. They deal with the largest number of customers and are responsible for a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

The number of complaints received generally correlates 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.

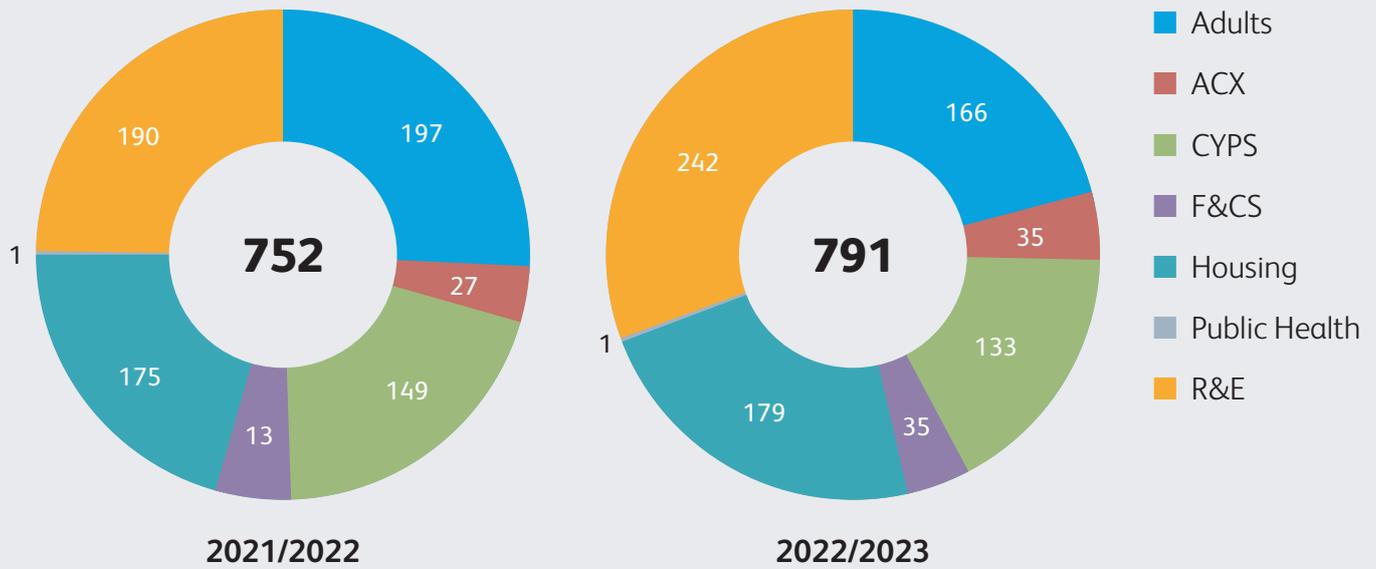
However, the increases in these two service areas are primarily as a result of an increase in Waste Management service complaints and an increase in complaints received in respect of property repairs. Please see Appendix 5 and 7 for further information.

Regarding the number of compliments received, this has increased by 5% overall, with 39 more received. Finance and Customer Services saw the biggest percentage increase at 169%, with 22 more received, followed by Regeneration and Environment 27%, with 52 more received. Housing services and Assistant Chief Executive's also saw a small increase.

Adult Care services and Children and Young People's services decrease in terms of numbers received and Public Health saw no change.

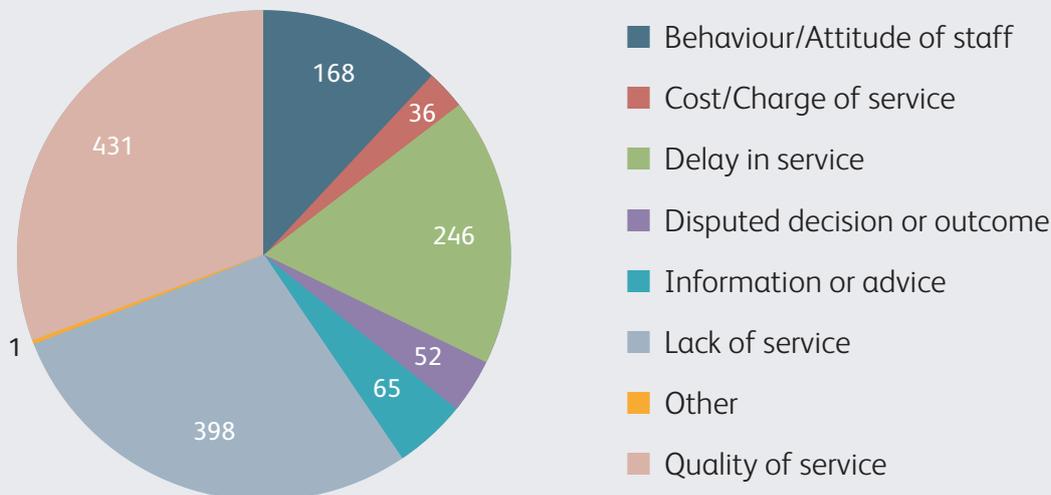
Although the overall increase is positive, the large changes in numbers received by directorate makes it clear that there can be a better engagement in the compliment process by staff, to make sure that all positive feedback is captured including feedback from satisfaction surveys.

Figure 3: Total number of compliments by Directorate – 2021/22 and 2022/23



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 2022/23:

Figure 4: Total number of complaints by category – 2022/23



431 (31%) of all complaints were categorised as quality of service. Complaints within this category have increased from 313 (28%) in 2021/22 (an increase of 27%).

Lack of service accounted for the second highest category of complaints, with 398 complaints (or 28%). Complaints within this category have increased from 304 (27%) in 2021/22 (an increase of 24%).

The third highest was delay in service at 246 (18%) received. Complaints within this category have increased in terms of numbers received from 201 in 2021/22 but have remained the same in terms of the proportion of total complaints (18%).

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, with 238 (175 in the Street Scene department and of these 125 were in Waste and Recycling) of the 398 total complaints in this category (see section 7).

In terms of quality of service, the majority were received in Housing services at 228, with 73 received in Housing Property Services (they are responsible for programmed works and repairs inspections), out of the 431 total complaints in this category (see section 5.2)

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:

- Attitude / Conduct
- No Service Provided/Action Taken
- Quality of Service Provided /Standard of Work
- Delay in Service Being Provided/Action Taken
- No Response to Enquiry
- Lack of Information/Advice
- Application/Assessment Outcome or Decision
- Missed Appointment/Service
- Lack of Enforcement Action/Sufficiency of Enforcement Action
- Damage to Property
- Incorrect/Inaccurate written or verbal advice
- Dispute Over Liability or Debt
- Lack of Communication
- Accessibility of Service/Facilities
- General Practice/Competence
- Refusal to Provide Service/Take Action

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

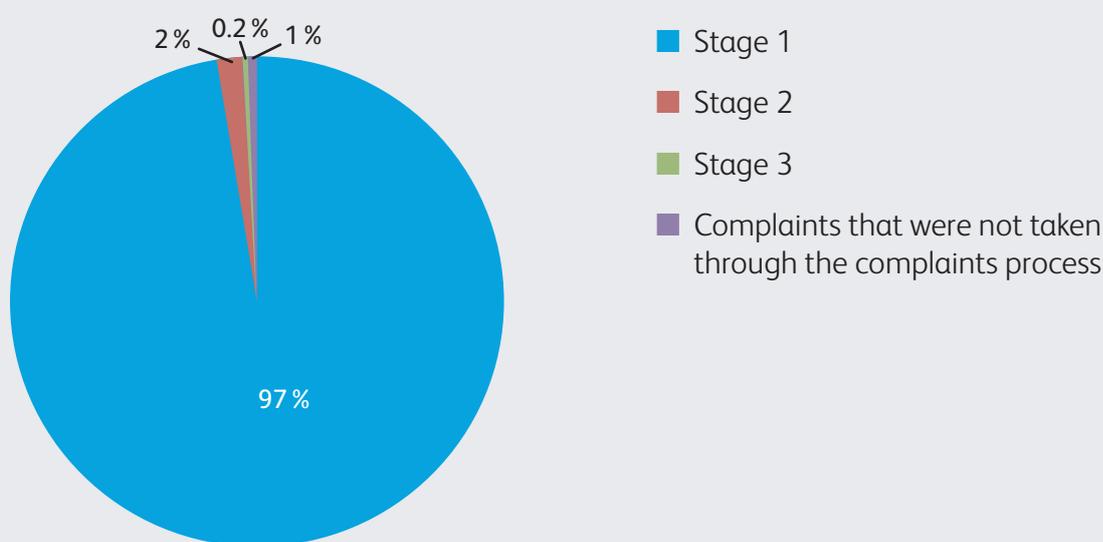
It should also be noted that more complaints were upheld in terms of the percentage of complaints responded to. This is where the Council has investigated and found a problem with the service provided, with 443 or 32% upheld (268 or 24% upheld in 2021/22 and 235 or 26% upheld in 2020/21) of all complaints. 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 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 complaint's procedure (referred to as informal complaints). These are complaints that are in relation to Council policy or decisions that have been formally approved in Cabinet. In these cases, the complaint is not taken through the formal procedure as it cannot be upheld, however all complainants receive a formal (written) response. This report includes these complaints in the overall total figures. In 2022/23, this amounted to only nine (1%) out of a total of 1397 complaints (in 2021/22 it was 19 (2%) out of a total of 1117 complaints).

Figure 5: Percentage of complaints escalating through the complaints procedures

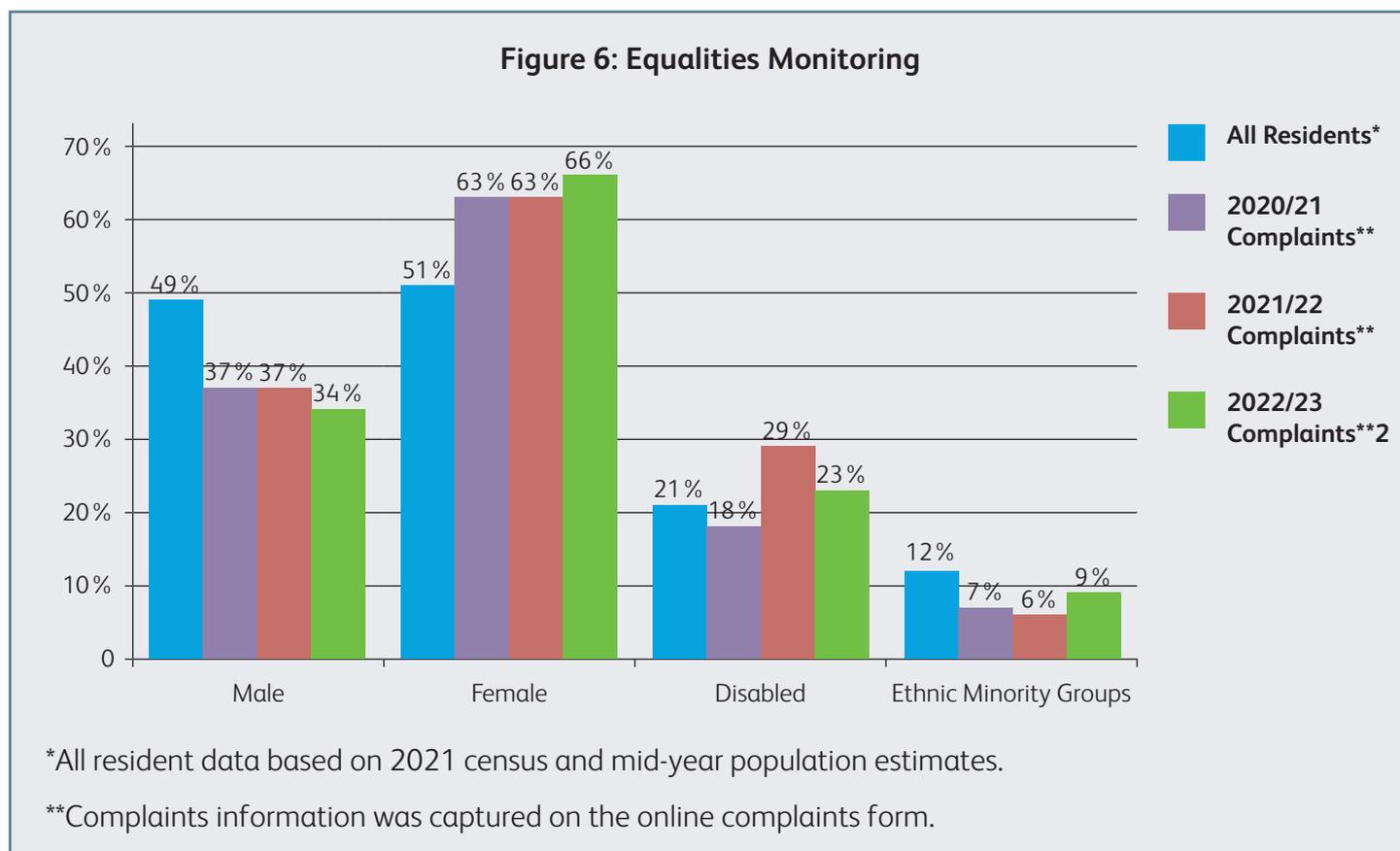


The diagram above outlines the number of complaints that reached the various stages of the complaint's procedures.

The extent to which complaints escalate through the 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 (97%) were resolved at stage 1, only 24, 2% of all complaints, were escalated to stage 2, compared with 27, 2%, in 2021/22.

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.



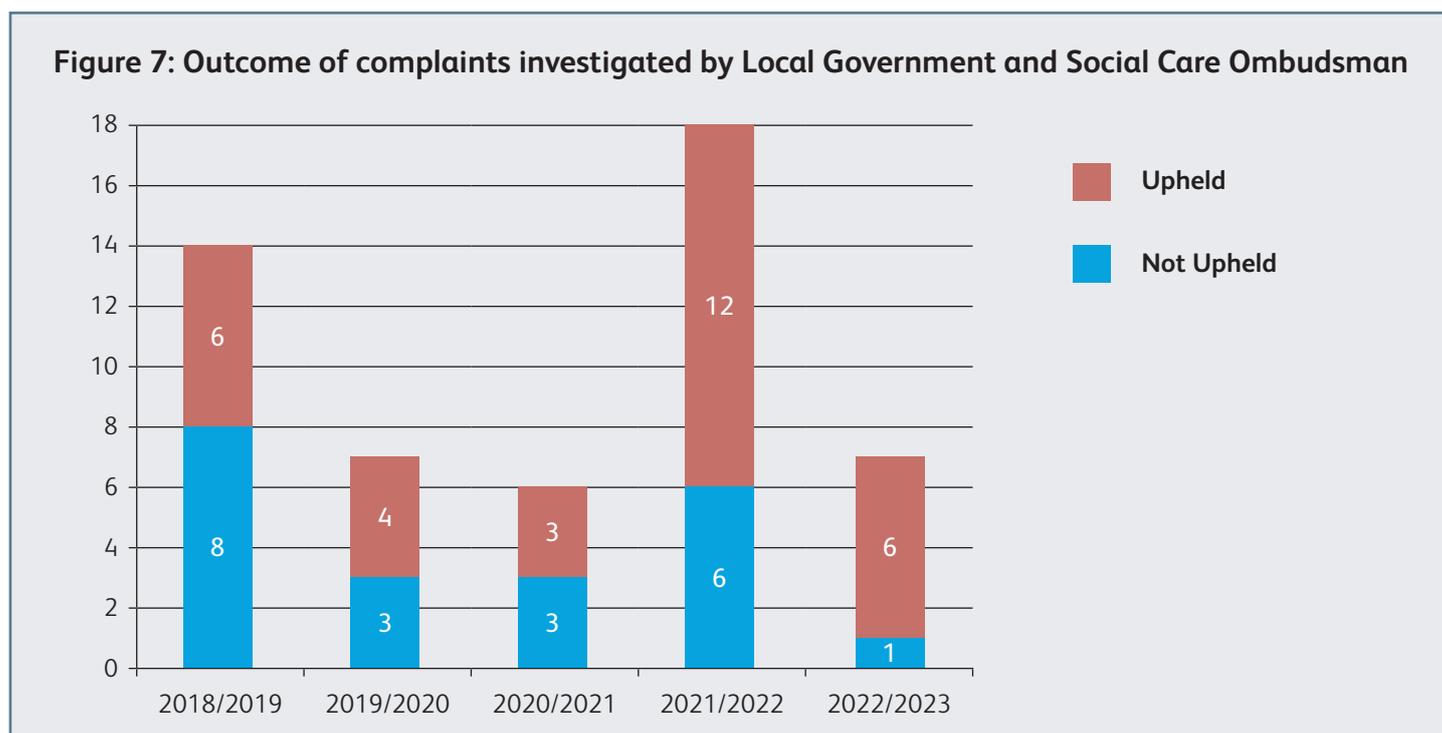
The information received indicates that significantly more female customers complained about Council services in 2022/23 and this is a consistent trend over the last three years. All directorates recorded a higher number of female complainants. For example, in Housing services the percentage of female complainants was 74% and Regeneration and Environment it was 52%.

It is also noted that numbers have decreased for those customers who are disabled, but it is still slightly above the average for all residents. In addition, the number of customers in ethnic minority groups who have made a complaint has increased and but 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). 45 complaints enquiries were directed to the LGSCO in 2022/23 (57 received in 2021/22) and of these, the LGSCO investigated seven (18 investigated in 2021/22). This is back to average numbers escalating from an unprecedented number investigated in 2021/22.

Figure 7 (see below) illustrates the number of complaints considered by the Ombudsman over the last five years. It shows that there have been 52 complaints investigated by the LGSCO between the financial years of 2018/19 and 2022/23 with a median five-year average of 10.4 per year.



In 2022/23, less complaints were investigated and less complaints were upheld by the LGSCO than in the previous year. Seven investigations compared to 1397 complaints is 0.5% of formal complaints received that have escalated to the LGSCO.

Six complaints out of the seven investigations were upheld. This equates to an upheld rate of 86%, which is in line with the Ombudsman's figure of the average uphold rate of similar authorities at 77%. Three upheld complaints were in Childrens and Young Peoples Services, one was in Finance and Customer Services, one was in Adult Care services and one in Assistant Chief Executives Directorate.

Appendix 1 outlines the LGSCO decisions for the Council for 2022/23 and how these compare with 16 statistical neighbour Councils. In 2022/23, the Council is in the top quarter in terms of the numbers investigated and the numbers upheld. It ranks as second out of 16 of the total investigated and third out of 16 of those complaints that were upheld. In the previous year, 2021/22, the Council benchmarked in the lower quarter for numbers investigated and numbers upheld.

Furthermore, it shows that the majority of complaints that were brought to the LGSCO (44 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 (0.5% escalation rate) reflects positively that the Council's complaints' 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 were two decisions made by the Housing Ombudsman in 2022/23, which were both not upheld, in comparison there was one decision in 2021/22, which was not upheld.

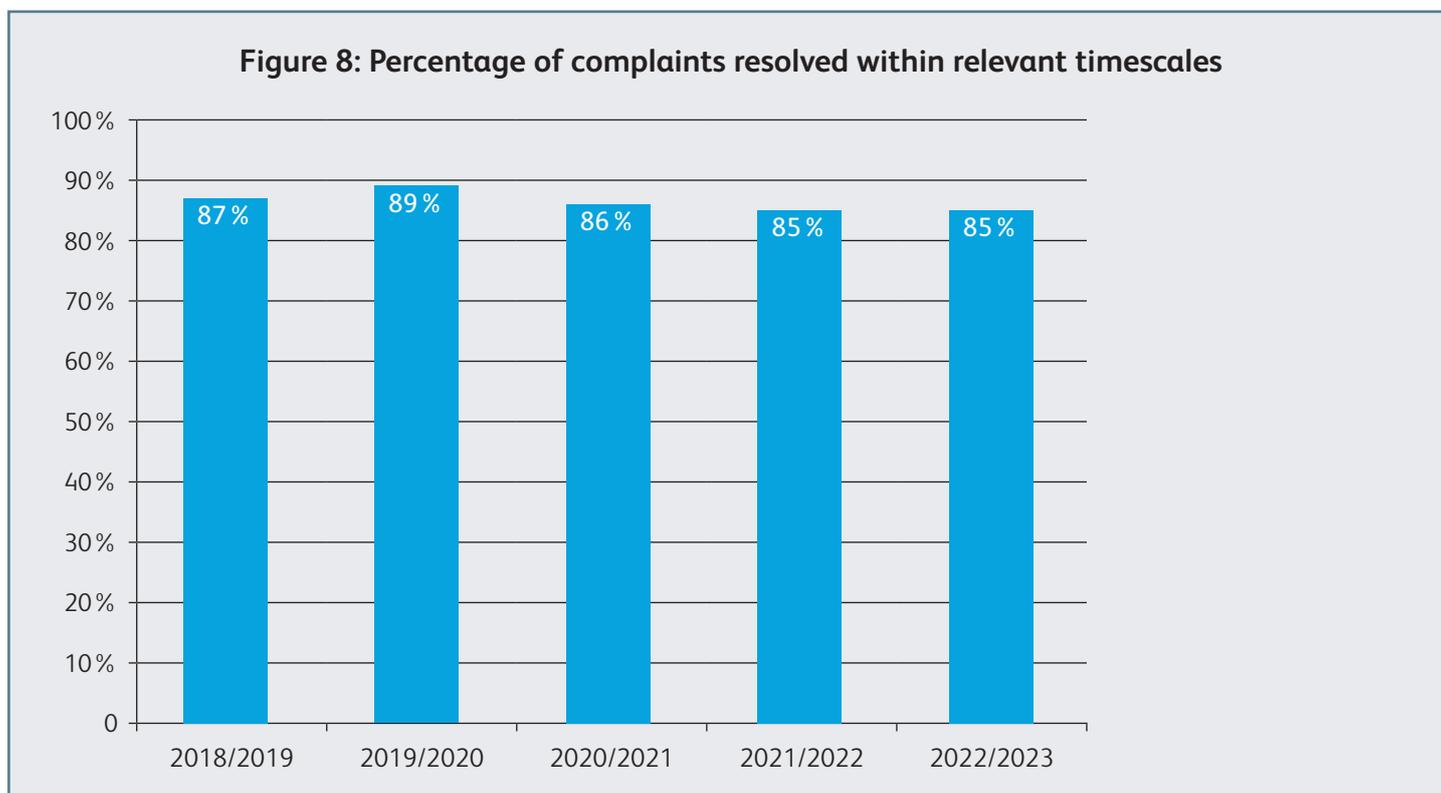
The complaint issues in these decisions were regarding a request to renew a kitchen and the response to neighbour nuisance reports.

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 been maintained at 85% of complaint responses within target timescale. It is slightly below the five-year average of 86% and it has met the Council Plan target of 85%. There has been a continued effort made across all Council services to maintain performance to timescales, despite the increase in numbers received from 1117 to 1397, a 25% increase.

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

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

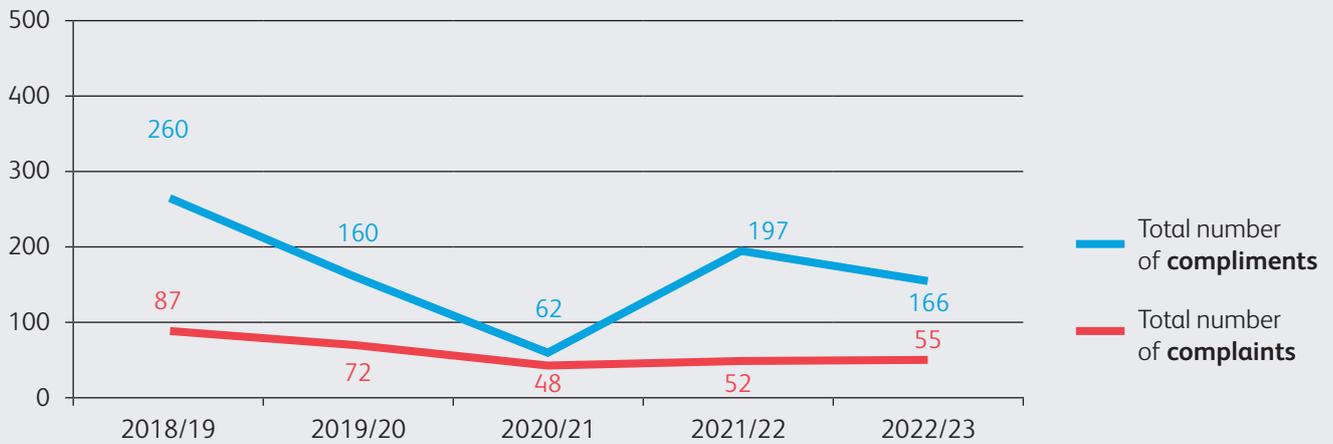


Figure 10: Percentage of complaints about Adult Care closed in timescales

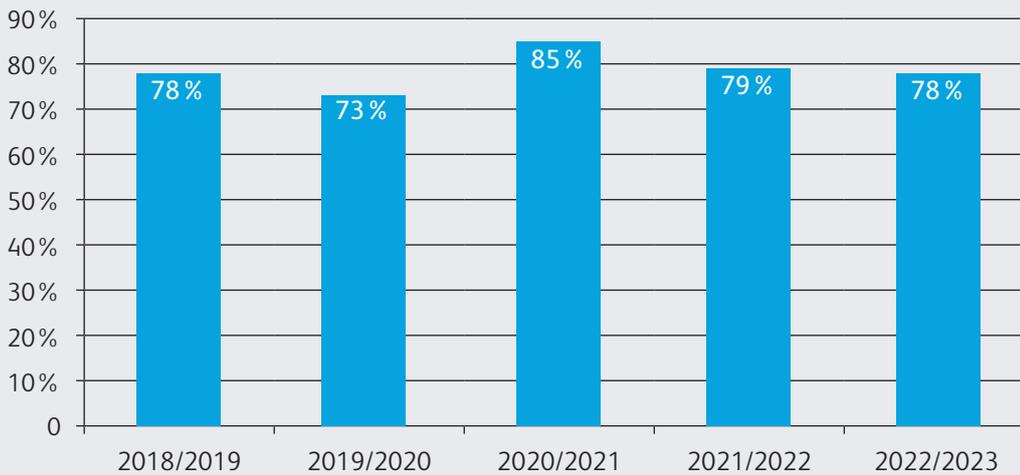
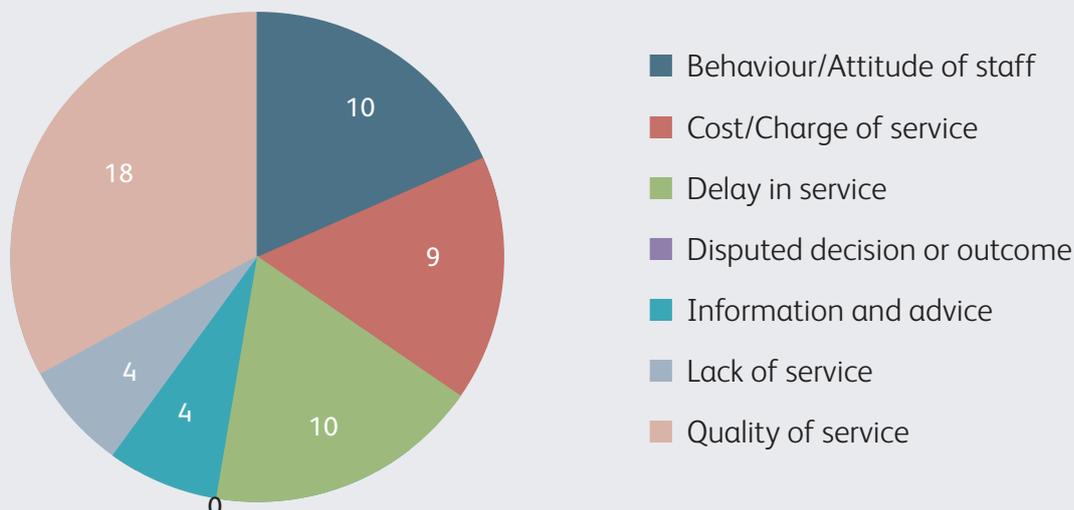


Figure 11: Complaints about Adult Care by category – 2022/23



5.1.1 Key Headlines

6%
more
complaints
received

More complaints were received about Adult Care. (55 in 2022/23 compared to 52 in 2021/22.)

Less compliments were received about Adult Care. (166 in 2022/23 compared to 197 in 2021/22.)

69%
fewer
compliments
received



Fewer complaints were upheld. 12 complaints were upheld in 2022/23 compared with 14 in 2021/22. This is a 14% decrease.

78% of complaints were responded to within timescales. Compared with 79% in 2021/22.



One Ombudsman complaint was received. It was upheld.

18 of 55 complaints were regarding Quality of Service. Ten were due to delay in service, and ten were regarding behaviour and attitude of staff.



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

- Delay in Service Being Provided/Action Taken
- No Service Provided/Action Taken
- Lack of Information/Advice
- Lack of Financial Support/Eligibility
- Dispute Over Liability or Debt

In addition, the increase in the number of formal complaints of 6% is significantly lower than the all Council increase of 25%. The largest change in complaints received was in the Integrated Discharge Team (Hospital Social Work Team) where they reduced from ten to four complaints received. This indicates that a better focus on communication with customers and their families, in part informed by the response to complaints, has contributed to this reduction. Community Occupational Therapy also saw a reduction in complaints received from three to one received this year.

Other services saw a small increase in complaints received, Safeguarding and MCA/DoLS Service, increased to six complaints received from one received in the previous year. Revenue and Payments increased from two to seven complaints received this year, which indicates additional financial pressures felt by the community in general. Finally, Locality Social Work Teams also saw a small increase from 24 to 28 received, this indicates the efforts made by front line Social Workers and managers to resolve concerns at the earliest opportunity despite pressures on the service.

Another positive was the significant reduction in Ombudsman enquiries, from six decisions to one decision in the year. One decision received is in line with the average number of investigations and the large increase in the previous year (2021/22) can be understood as an effect of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Adult Care in 2022/23:

Compliment for First Contact Team. "I wanted to say thank you very much for visiting me yesterday. You lifted my spirits and gave me hope. Thank you too for acting so quickly in getting me the aids to improve my abilities to be more independent."

Compliment for Hospital Social Work Team. "Her compassion and professionalism have shone through. Some people are the right type for their jobs and C is one of them. Please pass on our gratitude to C. All our family are grateful for all she's done."

Compliment for Reablement Team "Thank you for getting my mum back on her feet. Reablement a worth the weight in gold and all the ladies that have been really supportive and a great help to D and me as it was all getting a bit on top of me".

Compliment for Locality Social Work Team. "You've been brilliant you have done everything we have asked and followed up on everything that has been promised."

5.1.2 Lessons Learned

Adult Care made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2022/23. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below.

The Complaint

The customer had experienced delays when they requested a care assessment. In addition, they had been provided with unclear advice about the assessment process and how to access care.

What did the Council do?

Investigating the complaint, we reviewed the information and advice provided and the time taken to respond to the requests for assessment. Through sharing the learning from this complaint and providing additional training and advice to key members of staff the service will now ensure correct information and advice is given about the assessment process. It will ensure that acknowledgement letters are sent when requests are received for assessments/ re-assessments so that there is better information if the service cannot action the request immediately.

Who is better off?

Improvements to the Council's Adult Social Care assessment process will benefit all current and future users of adult social services 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.

Other lessons learned from complaints.

Some additional examples on where we have improved our service are as follows.

Improved the information and advice around Direct Payments to ensure customers and their families and supporters are happy with the level of information given at the time they are set up.

Ensuring we explain with thoroughness, in plain language, the principals of making safeguarding personal to those who have had to make a referral. To make sure that they fully understand what will happen.

Providing training to Social Work staff to better ensure that contingency plans are realistic and achievable and that they can be put in place without delay when required.

5.2 Housing Services

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

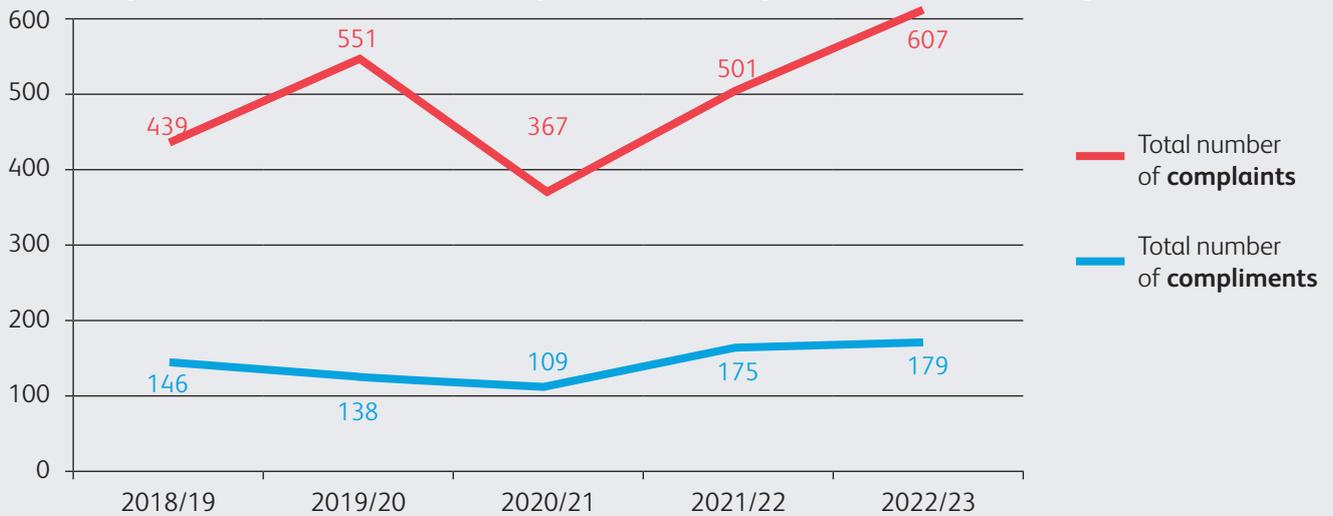


Figure 13: Percentage of complaints about Housing Services closed within timescales

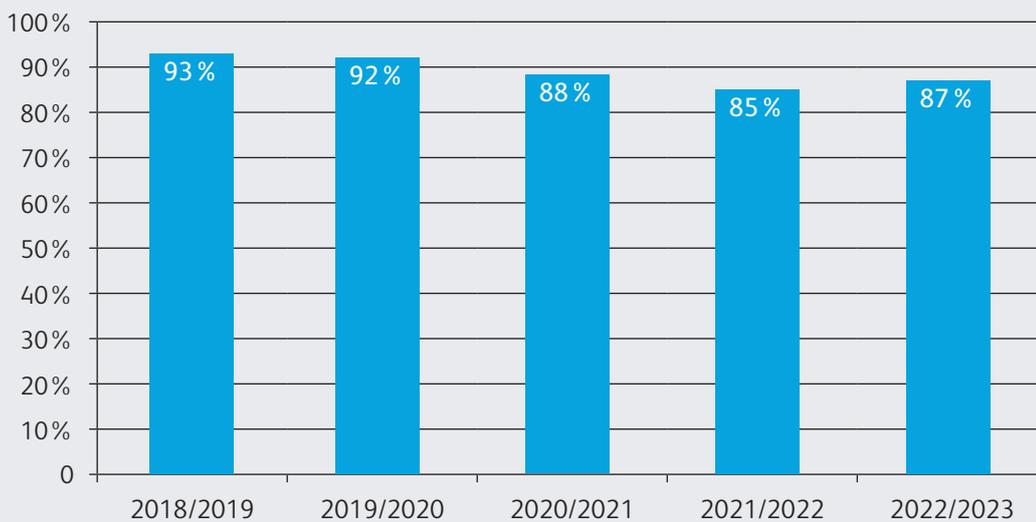
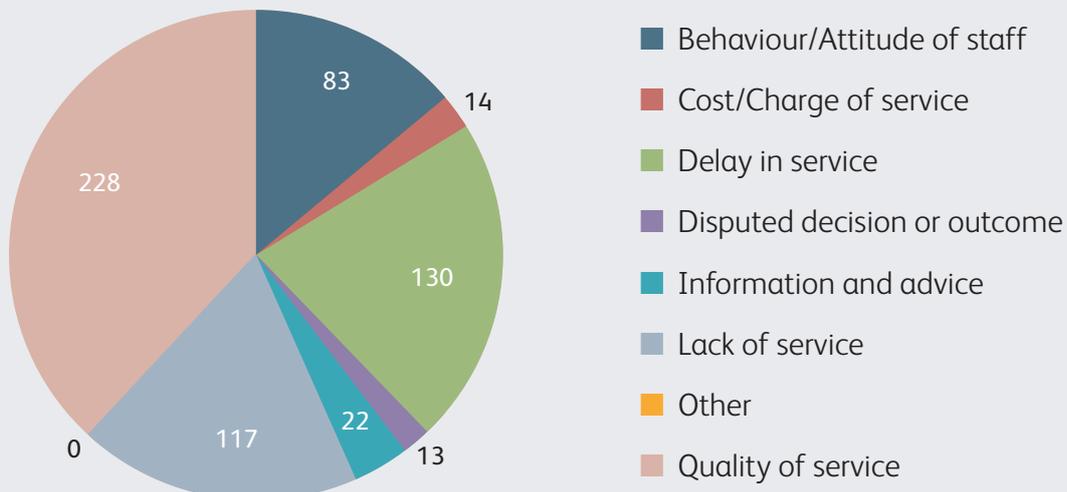


Figure 14: Complaints about Housing Services by category – 2022/23



5.2.1 Key Headlines

21%

more
complaints
received

More complaints about Housing Services were received.
(607 in 2022/23 compared with 501 in 2021/22.)

Compliments have remained consistent.
(179 in 2022/23 compared to 175 in 2021/22.)

2%

more
compliments
received



Consistent proportion of upheld complaints.
27% (163/607) in 2022/23 compared to 2021/23 27% (135/501).

87% of complaints were responded to within timescales. This meets the Council Plan target of 85% and is an improvement on 2021/22 (85%).



Two Ombudsman complaint decisions were received.
Neither were upheld.

228 complaints were regarding Quality of Service. 130 were due to delays in service and 117 were regarding lack of service.



Examples of some of the compliments received for housing services in 2022/23:

- "The two electricians who attended the property were very polite and made sure everything was clean and tidy and checked additional items before leaving."
- "My sincere thanks for all you have done together with your supporting staff."
- "The operative was very professional and carried out the works to a very high standard, I am very impressed."

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

- Quality of service being provided.
- Delays in service provided/action taken.
- Lack of service provided.
- Attitude and behaviour of team.

Complaints received for Housing Services increased by 21 %; this is lower than the total Council increase of 25 %. Housing and Estates and Strategic Housing Development saw a decrease in complaints: 2 % (two complaints) and -18 % (three complaints) respectively. Delays in service had been reduced and applications had been processed in a timely manner.

Business and Commercial Services saw the greatest increase in complaints, 95 %, from 2021/22 to 2022/23 (39 to 76). 43 % (33) of these were related to the attitude and conduct of team members and a common theme from these complaints is their relation to difficult conversations around rent collection.

Housing Property Services had an increase of 27 % from 2021/22 to 2022/23 (135 to 172). The service responded to a large portion of complaints between January and March (36 %). The winter months saw an increase in complaints around boiler issues, leaks from roofs and pipework and then resulting damp and mould issues. Throughout the year quality of service accounts for 42 % (73) of complaints for Housing Property Services where return visits had to be made to complete work previously started or where customers were dissatisfied with the actions taken to deal with damp and mould.

Repairs Contractors received 22 % more complaints in 2021-22 compared to 2022-23 (112 to 137). 20 % (28) of the complaints received for this service were for the quality of the service provided and 16 % (22) were due to the standard of the work carried out requiring repeat visits to rectify.

Housing Options have received 16 % more complaints (76 up to 88). Complaints for this service are mostly attributed to quality of service provided (45 %) and lack of service (21 %) where customers believed they should have had more, or quicker support. This is reflective of the issues attended by Housing Options including homelessness, temporary accommodation, and advice and assessment around this.

5.2.2 Lessons Learned

Housing Services made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2022/23. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below.

The Complaint

The customer was chased for arrears for their District Heating payment, due to a problem with the direct debit payment, which on investigation it was found to have not been set up correctly by the Council.

What did we do?

An investigation found that there had been a technical issue with the new housing online website portal where the direct debit mandate was created. The service provided an apology, resolved the payment issue, and temporarily removed the option for residents to create a direct debit mandate online, until the issue had been rectified. The problem was quickly resolved, and all District Heating payments can now be paid by direct debit via the website.

Who is better off?

This will benefit all current and future users of District Heating.

Other lessons learned from complaints.

Some additional examples on where we have improved our services are as follows.

A complaint about mess left on a driveway during an empty property clearance by a Council contractor. The issue was raised at their staff training events to avoid this happening in the future.

A complaint about a delay in processing tenancy succession. Steps were taken to learn from the complaint and improve the communication procedures between key departments.

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

5.3.1 Key Headlines

- No complaints were received. (Two in 2021/22)
- One compliment was recorded. (Nine in 2021/22)
- No complaints were upheld. (None upheld in 2021/22)
- No complaints were investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

5.3.2 Complaints

- None received

5.3.3 Compliments

Detail below.

Compliment for Public Health. "The memorial event was R's creation, and she has worked extremely hard to make it the success it is."

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE

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

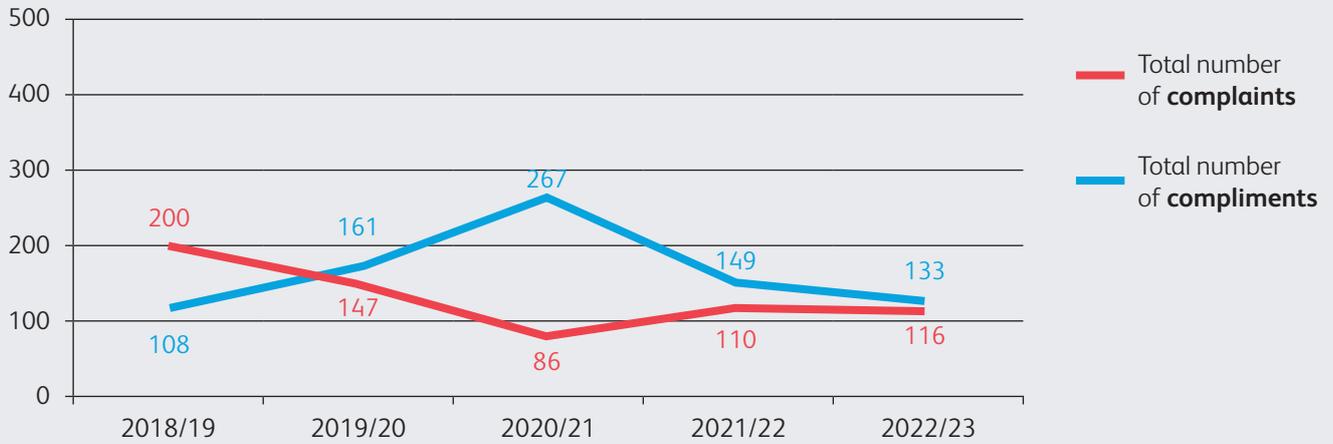


Figure 16: Percentage of complaints about Children and Young People's Services closed within timescales

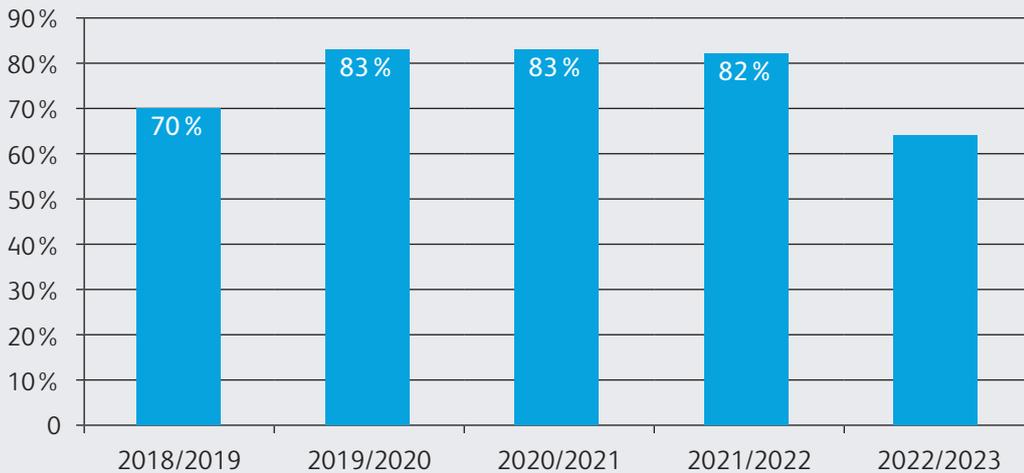
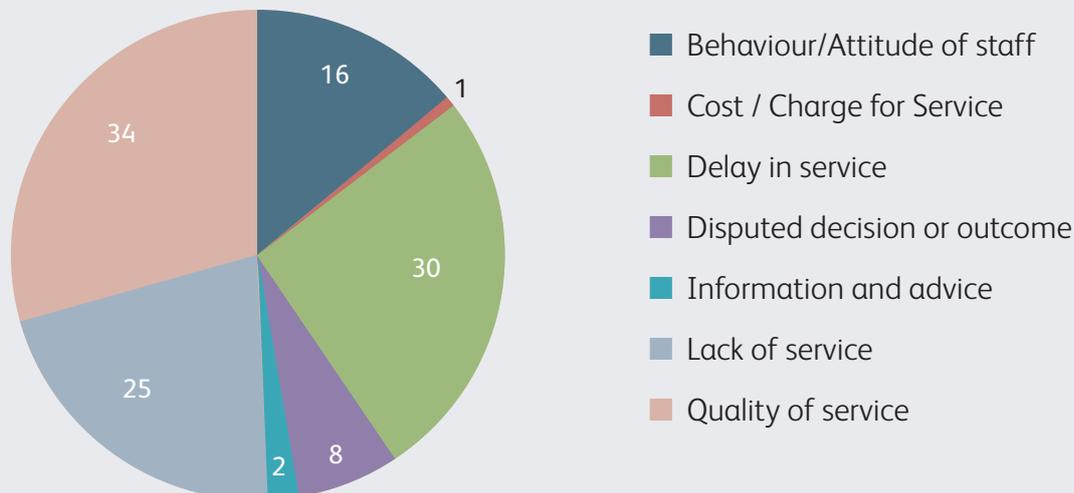


Figure 17: Complaints about Children and Young People's Services by category – 2022/23



6.1 Key Headlines

5%

more
complaints
received

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

(116 in 2022/23 compared with 110 in 2021/22.)

Less compliments were received about Children's and Young People's services.

(133 in 2022/23 compared with 149 in 2021/22.)

11%

fewer
compliments
received



More complaints were upheld.

(80 in 2022/23 compared with 57 in 2021/22.)

64% of complaints were responded to within timescales.

This is lower than the previous year.



Three Ombudsman complaint decisions were received, compared to four last year.

All of these were upheld.

Most complaints were regarding delay in service, 34 of 116.

Followed by quality of service, 30 of 116.



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

Managers have continued to be encouraged and supported to address concerns at the earliest opportunity, so that any problems can be resolved before they enter the formal complaint procedure, which means the complaint levels remain at a lower level.

Some key learning and improvements from complaints:

- Improved recognition, and therefore action by Social Workers to refer cases to the Edge of Care team to prevent relationship breakdowns.
- Development sessions for Social Workers focusing on reviewing family plans to prevent delays, improving communication regarding sharing difficult information about their child's care plan, and providing opportunities to involve the parents in relevant conversations and improve two-way communication.
- Reminding staff of the importance of responding to parents/SENDCos in a timely manner and managing expectations early.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Children & Young People's Services in 2022/23:

"She always treats them with respect, keeps them updated and is always available when needed. She keeps in contact with them regularly."

"Thanks so much for all your patience, support and guidance in helping me understand what was needed as I had no idea and was struggling."

"Want to commend social work practice and the Virtual school. I have very little contact with Rotherham being from a Sheffield school but wanted to say that the VS have been excellent in supporting us with the children's educational needs. I also want to add that the moment that I picked up the phone yesterday to report the concerns regarding the child, that the social work practice has been 'outstanding'. I work in a highly deprived area as a safeguarding lead and feel that others could 'learn a lot from you guys in Rotherham.'"

6.2 Lessons Learned

Children and Young People's Services made several service improvements in 2022/23 following the feedback from customers. An example of this is outlined in the case study below.

The Complaint

The Council received a complaint from a carer relating to financial assistance and the delay in providing monies. The information received by the carers gave approximate figures based on the information that was held on file but stated that this could change once evidence had been received as the financial assessment is a means tested assessment. Once this information was received, it resulted in a lower amount being awarded.

What did we do?

The learning from this complaint was shared within the relevant services so that practitioners were mindful about the language that they used when discussing finances and communication to be clearer as the process can be complex.

Who is better off?

Families dealing with complex financial assessments, ensuring that information is clear and sets out what is an estimate and the explanations around what a means test actually means.

Who is better off?

Some additional examples on where we have improved our service are as follows.

The process for approval of Special Guardianship Orders or Child Arrangement Order allowances was lengthy and repetitive. The process was reviewed to prevent future delays and duplication of reports, documents, and authorisations.

The locality model within the Education Health Care Planning Team was introduced in order to support communication and when handing over cases. Caseworkers are now linked to schools and hold a caseload.

Focused learning sessions around the importance of accurate record keeping and the importance of communication.

7. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

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

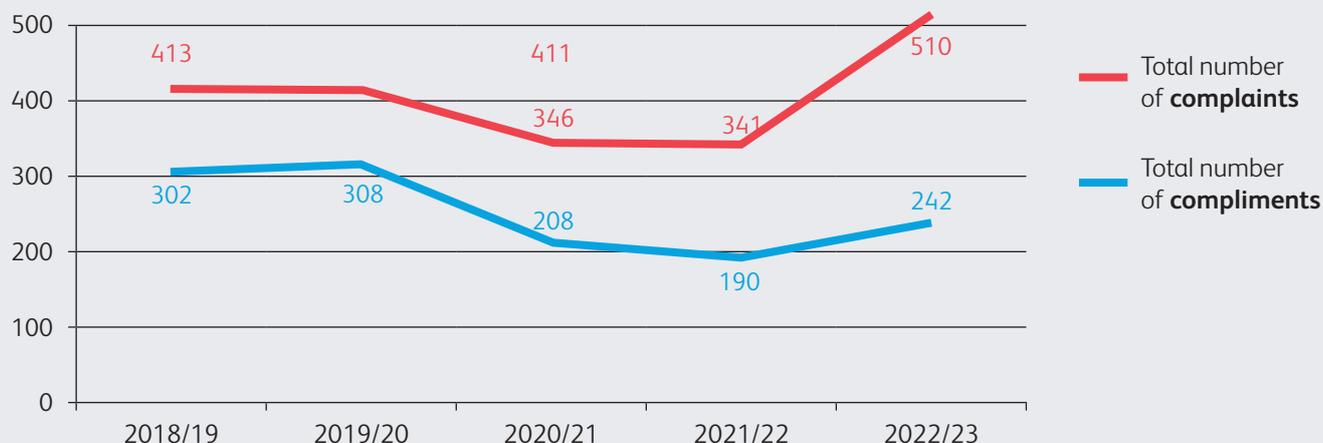


Figure 19: Percentage of complaints about Regeneration and Environment closed within timescales

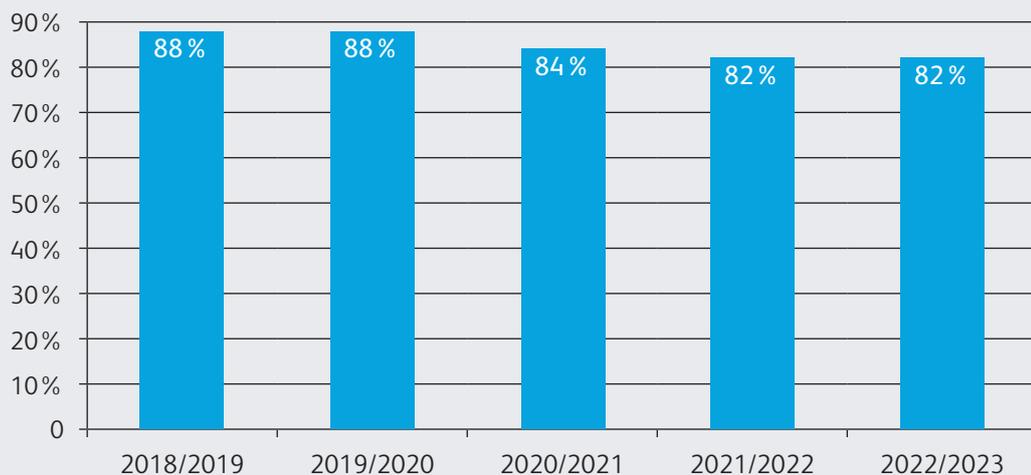
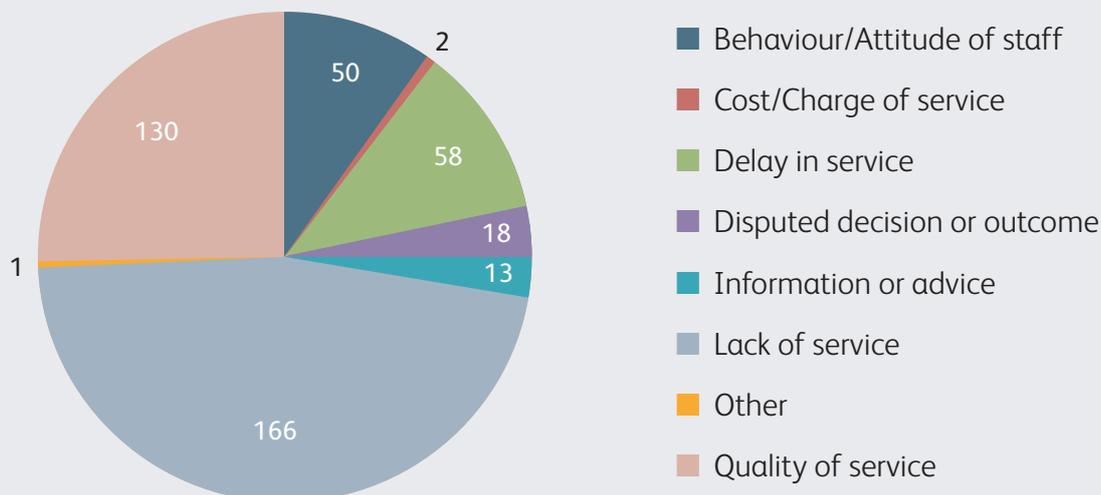


Figure 20: Complaints about Regeneration and Environment by category – 2022/23



7.1 Key Headlines

50%

more
complaints
received

More complaints about Regeneration and Environment Services were received (510 in 2022/23 compared with 341 in 2021/22.)

More compliments were received about Regeneration and Environment Services (242 in 2022/23 compared with 190 in 2021/22.)

27%

more
compliments
received



More complaints were upheld (200 in 2021/22 compared with 73 in 2021/22.)

More complaints responded to within timescales. (84% in 2022/23 compared with 82% in 2021/22.)



1 Ombudsman complaint decision was received. The complaint was not upheld. Six received in 2021/22.

47% of complaints were regarding lack of service (237 of 509 complaints). 129 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 or replacement bins.
- Actions and conduct of waste operatives.
- Lack of action in respect of environmental health and community protection issues.
- Lack of maintenance of trees following issues being reported to the Council.

The largest number of complaints were regarding domestic waste and recycling collections in the Waste Management service, with 261 complaints received. This was the main contributing factor in the increase of complaints for the directorate and was primarily as a result of staffing issues over the summer period, which had a significant impact on the level of service provided.

The number of complaints received for Regulation and Enforcement also increased significantly from 26 to 46 between 2021/22 and 2022/23, where complaints primarily related to the perceived lack of enforcement action.

The Tree Service also received a significant number of complaints regarding lack of action in response to reports regarding trees; increasing from 19 complaints received in the previous year to 21 received in this year.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Regeneration and Environment Services in 2022/23:

- “Just wanted to take a moment to pass on my thanks to you, you’ve both been incredibly helpful. Really appreciate how prompt you guys have been answering queries and coming out to site, thank you for providing such good service.”
- “The team are very easy to deal with, always act in a professional manner and go above and beyond their normal duties. This team always blow me away with their hard work, dedication, and commitment to the task in hand. Today I visited the above property, and I could have cried at the transformation. I have attached before and after photographs and I invite managers to recognise the team’s hard work. I honestly do not think these guys are paid enough and I feel they should be considered for a pay regrade. I also feel they should be nominated for the heart awards, if they still take place.”
- “It’s great to see the improvements on the recent road surfacing and markings and I’d like to offer my thanks to all those involved, residents in the Ward are very grateful for all the work done.”
- “Thank you for all your help you proved there are still people who take their job looking after people seriously.....you made a horrible situation so much better by being so good at your job. We can’t thank you enough.”
- “I wish to send praise and thank you to the gentlemen who carried out repairs and resurfacing work to the road on which I live, I have campaigned for a long time for this to be done and hope that you will personally pass the message on to the chaps involved with this work. A massive thank you.”

7.2 Lessons Learned

Regeneration and Environment Services made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2022/23. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

Complaints were received regarding missed waste and recycling collections and delays in returning to empty bins that had been missed. Complaints were also received regarding delays in the delivery of new and replacement bins.

What did we do?

During summer 2022, the Waste Management Service experienced significant staffing issues, which led to an increase in complaints. This meant that the service operated with minimum staffing levels for an extended period of time which caused an increase in missed collections as well as delays in returning to collect missed bins and the delivery of new and replacement bins.

An improvement plan was put in place, and which included the following improvements to the service:

- Recruitment of additional staff to cover periods of staffing pressure.
- Working with colleagues in Customer Services to improve the advice and information provided to residents when reporting issues with collections.
- Completed an exercise to optimise collection routes which has provided more efficient collections.
- Introduced new processes for missed collections and assisted collections.

Who is better off?

The contingency measures put in place have ensured that the impact on staffing levels during the summer months has not been repeated. The number of missed collections has decreased and the number of complaints has also decreased.

This has resulted in fewer missed collections and no further delays in returning to collect bins that have been missed.

Other lessons learned from complaints

Customer's data is more secure and there is less opportunity for incorrectly addressed correspondence to Some additional examples on where we have improved our service are as follows.

- Clifton Park Museum is now operating card and cash payments from April 2022. The temporary system of only accepting card payments was due to Covid measures that were put in place to ensure safe working practices and limited access to cashiers and cash transportation.
- Reviewed the system of monitoring telephone messages for the Planning Department to prevent enquiries being missed in the future.
- Internal recording systems to be implemented in Education Transport so that all communications are actioned, documented, and recorded; so that any member of staff dealing with a query is aware of any previous communications, incidents, complaints, and actions.
- The Service has set up a Neighbourhood Road Safety Scheme Fund to facilitate requests from residents for road safety improvements.

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

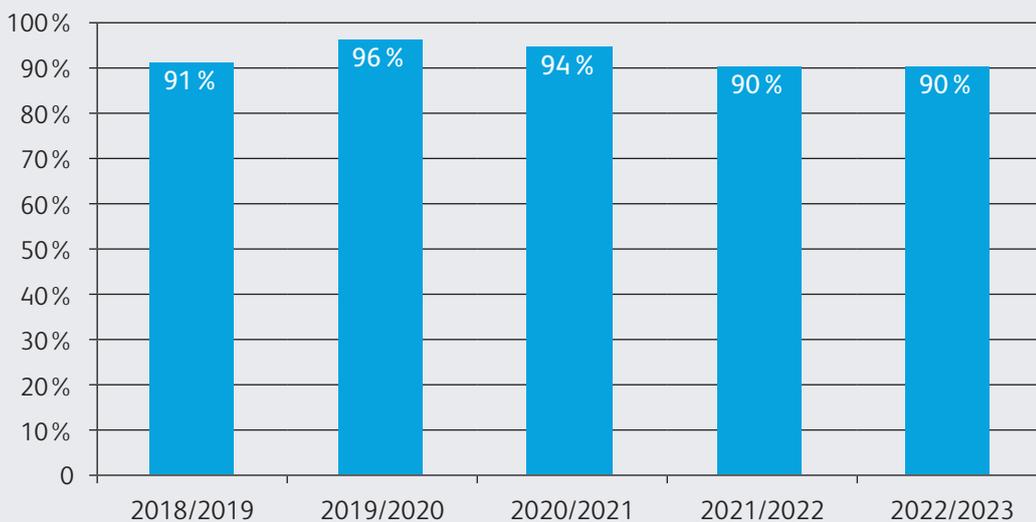
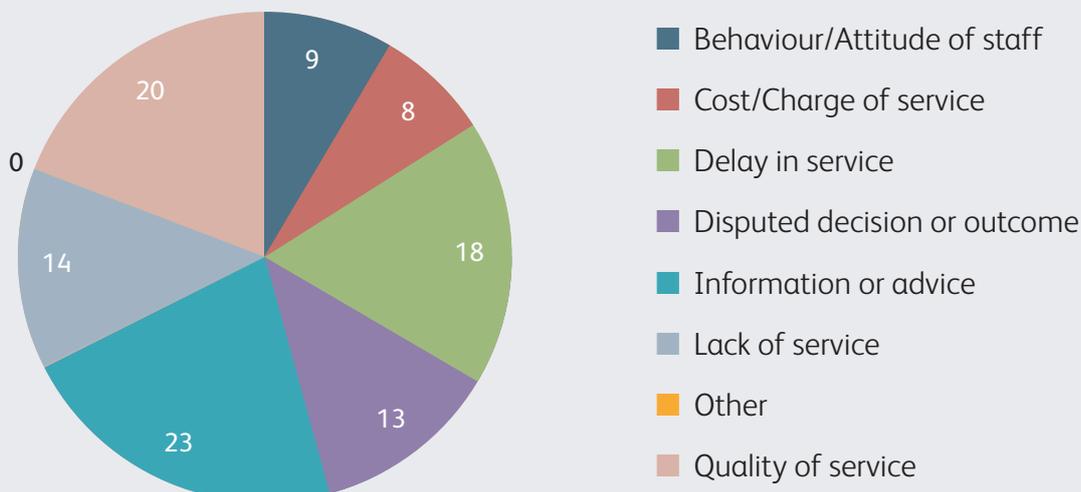


Figure 23: Complaints about Finance and Customer Services by category – 2022/23



8.1 Key Headlines

1%
less
complaints
received

Less complaints about Finance and Customer Services were received.

(105 in 2022/23 compared with 106 in 2021/22.)

More compliments were received about Finance and Customer Services.

(35 in 2022/23 compared with 13 in 2022/21.)

169%
more
compliments
received



More complaints were upheld.

(24 in 2022/23 compared with 19 in 2021/22.)

90% of complaints were responded to within timescales.

This is above the 5-year council average of 83% and is consistent with the performance in 2021/22, 90%.



One Ombudsman complaint decision were received.

It was upheld. None were received in 2021/22.

20% of complaints were regarding information and advice.

(21 out of 105) and 19% were regarding delay in service and quality of service (20 out of 105.)



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.
- Call waiting times for Customer Services.
- Errors in administration of Council Tax accounts.

The directorate saw a significant decrease in the number of complaints received in previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, complaints for this year and the previous year have remained consistent and are still significantly less than pre-pandemic numbers of complaints.

Complaints for Customer Services increased by 26% due to an increase in demand for service and call volumes from June 2022 and the introduction of new staff into the service to meet demand.

In addition, complaints in relation to Council Tax have decreased by 18% from the previous year. This in part appears to reflect the impact of the continuation of additional financial support being provided to customers, which led to complaints being received in the past.

In addition, a further six complaints were received in relation to Legal Services.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Finance and Customer Services in 2022/23:

- “I would just like to take this opportunity to thank the officer in the account management department. That lady saved my day after a rough few months this lady helped me above and beyond and I will be eternally grateful...I would love this message to get back to her. She really has made an impact on me in a very good way.”
- “I’m just writing to thank the lady who helped me get a marriage certificate fast tracked to another passport office; without your help he wouldn’t have the passport. Thank you for being kind and patient with me and keeping in contact the entire process. We appreciate it.”
- “I would like to express my thanks to a gentleman who has helped my son apply for a bus pass who is in receipt of DLA.....Very impressed with the service I have received, and I just wanted to let you know that you have a great asset to your team.”

8.2 Lessons Learned

Finance and Customer Services made several service improvements in 2022/23 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 a repair being undertaken to lighting in a communal area of a block of flats and had to make several phone calls to the Council before the repair was completed.

What did we do?

The service identified that the repair had been incorrectly recorded against the property address of the customer who had reported the issue rather than to the location of the block of flats. It was also identified that there was an issue with the postcode on the system, which meant that when the repairs operative attended, they could not locate the property or communal area of the relevant block.

The issue with the postcode on the system has been rectified to ensure that operatives are able to locate the property for any future repairs. Further training has also been provided to our Customer Service Advisors to ensure that repair jobs for communal areas are recorded correctly.

Who is better off?

There are no longer delays in repairs being completed in communal areas as all Customer Services Advisors are aware of how to correctly records repairs for these areas. No further complaints have been received where this was the cause of a delay in completing a repair.

Other lessons learned from complaints.

Some additional examples on where we have improved our service are as follows:

Trained Customer Service Agents to make full use of information held on the Council’s Housing System to provide accurate advice to customers.

Further checks put in place to negate an issue where some customers did not receive online Council tax bills.

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 the Complaints 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 2022/23 is provided in summary below.

9.1 Key Headlines

- Four complaints were received (Three in 2021/22).
- 35 compliments were recorded (27 in 2021/22).
- All Four were stage 1 complaints. No Stage 2 complaints.
- Two complaints were upheld (Three upheld in 2021/22).
- One Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decision (Upheld).
- 75 % of complaints were resolved within statutory timescales (100 %, in 2021/22).

9.2 Complaints

The subject matter of each complaint received is listed below:

Democratic Services

- Governance of a school admissions appeal hearing.

Human Resources - Shared Service Centre

- Unhappy with referral to a debt collection agency over an overpayment.

Neighbourhoods - South Area

- Incorrect information on council website in respect of Waverley Community Council.

Policy, Performance and Intelligence

- Seeking compensation for property damage under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

9.3 Compliments

Examples include:

Compliment for Democratic Services. "I would like to thank you for the professionalism and promptness you have displayed in handling our numerous enquiries over the last two years."

Compliment for Learning and Development Team. "Thank you for all the support & assistance you have given me over the past few years when trying to co-ordinate the Training Programme."

Compliment for Policy, Performance, and Intelligence Service. "Can I just say thank you to you all for helping out today. The feedback on the workshop from all the people I spoke to was overwhelmingly great, and that isn't an easy to please group!"

10. NEXT STEPS, 2023/24

During 2022/23 the numbers of complaints increased demonstrating the challenges facing the Council and the pressures on the delivery of services, as services normalised following 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 are the planned actions in 2023/24 to ensure that the way the Council deals with complaints and responds to customer feedback continues to improve.

Key actions included:

- Self-assessment to be completed for the new Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- Complaints Team self-assessment completed every 12 months to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- Complaint Policy and Complaint Procedures will be changed to comply with the new requirements of the code.
- Stage 2 complaints for all Corporate Complaints, including Housing Services, will have a response time of four weeks (previously five weeks).
- Complaint satisfaction survey to be fully rolled out for all complaints.
- 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.
- Ensure compliance against benchmarked standards ahead of expected inspections in Adult Care and Housing Services.
- 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.
- 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 that an Ombudsman investigation has been 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. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities has taken place and their best practice approaches will be used to further increase the numbers of compliments received.
- Continue to train front line staff and managers in respect of the formal complaints process and best practice when responding to customer complaints.

APPENDIX ONE

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decisions 2022/23, 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
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council	1	0	26	20	5	3	8	55	38%	77%
Halton Borough Council	1	2	5	9	1	4	5	22	80%	72%
Rotherham Council	5	3	15	14	1	6	7	44	86%	77%
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	2	1	12	15	2	7	9	39	78%	77%
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council	1	0	13	13	3	7	10	37	70%	72%
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council	3	1	18	20	3	8	11	53	73%	77%
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council	6	9	15	20	6	8	14	64	57%	77%
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	2	1	14	31	3	9	12	60	75%	77%
Wakefield City Council	6	5	13	20	4	10	14	58	71%	77%
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	1	0	20	19	2	12	14	54	86%	77%
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council	4	5	15	31	3	12	15	70	80%	77%
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council	1	1	14	30	4	15	19	65	79%	77%
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	3	3	21	26	7	15	22	75	68%	72%
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council	1	4	16	27	1	17	18	66	94%	77%
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	8	5	15	23	6	21	27	78	78%	77%

