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To:- All Committee Members

AUDIT COMMITTEE - WEDNESDAY, 28TH JULY, 2021

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at the next Wednesday, 28th July, 2021 meeting of the Audit Committee, the following reports that were marked as 'to follow' on the agenda sent out recently.

Agenda No	Item
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- | | |
|-----|---|
| 18. | <u>Annual Corporate Complaints Report 2020 - 21 Wokingham</u> (Pages 3 - 14) |
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To receive the Annual Corporate Complaints Report 2020 - 21 Wokingham.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', written in a cursive style.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive

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Formal Complaints – Annual Report Summary

2020-21



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Annual Report | Executive Summary

The number of complaints recorded increased compared to the previous year. This was a result of better reporting following the rebrand of the complaints policy and the creation of the Focus Group. Formal reporting of early resolution began in quarter 3.

Business Context 2020-21

- The Covid-19 pandemic did initially impact the volume of complaints received, as customers showed greater tolerance during the height of the lockdown. However, it would also appear that complaints had been ‘saved’ for later submission, as many of the issues raised were familiar, but may have been made worse by the pandemic (e.g. maintenance repairs).
- The Complaints Focus group was established and assisted with:
 - ✓ An increase in the number of complaints resolved outside the formal process. This number increased from 40% in Q3 to 50% in Q4.
 - ✓ Better reporting of complaints and more bespoke responses.
 - ✓ Improved understanding of what gave rise to a complaint and actions needed to avoid their repeat.
- Housing maintenance repairs made up the highest proportion of complaints, due to Covid-19 social distancing restrictions, as contractors were limited by the number of jobs that could be completed in a day.
- Dissatisfaction over how decisions were communicated, were themes for why customers complained.

Directorate	Formal	Early Resolution
ASC	30	5
CIC	64	36
Children's Services	66	12
Place & Growth	69	61
Resources & Assets	15	14
TOTALS	244	128

What is the learning...

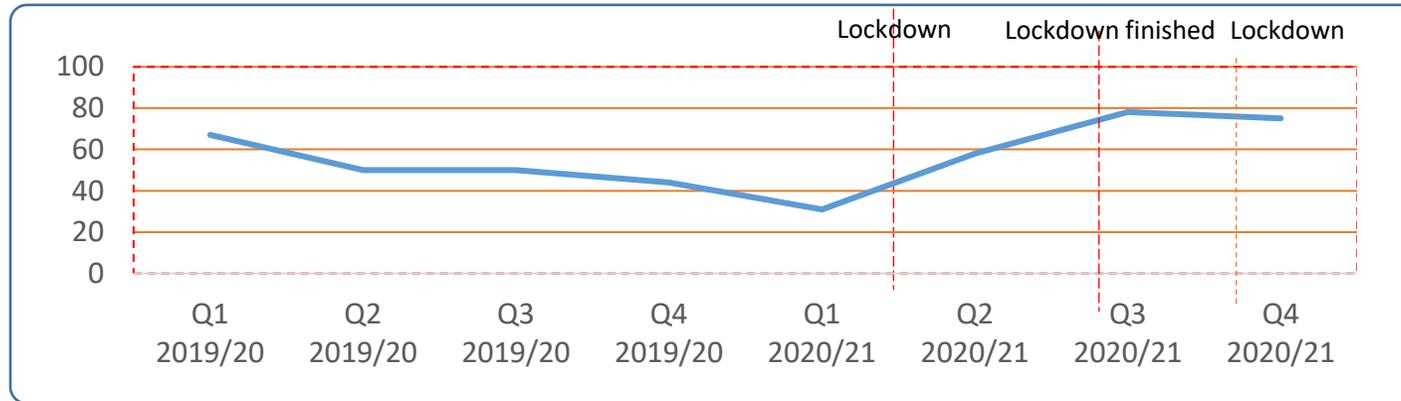
- Clear communication and accessible information about process and procedures for residents will help to better manage expectations, particularly around the limits of the Council’s statutory powers.
- Due to COVID, the volume of customer interactions and work levels have increased, but comparatively speaking formal complaints have not.
- Seasonal pressures normally experienced (Heating Maintenance call outs) have been exacerbated by Covid 19 restrictions.

What is the action...

- Complaint owners to proactively communicate where residents can influence on decisions and be clear on those where they cannot.
- Children’s Services introduced a complaints learning log to identify what actions can initiate tangible improvements in service.
- Complaint owners now improving their focus on root cause analysis to understand what mitigation can be done in the future.
- Housing engaged further with tenants to manage customer expectations.

Formal Complaints | Volumes

The number of formal complaints managed throughout the year increased by 16%. Improved complaints reporting and co-ordinated responses have impacted on this. The volume of customer interactions and work levels have increased, but comparatively speaking formal complaints have not.

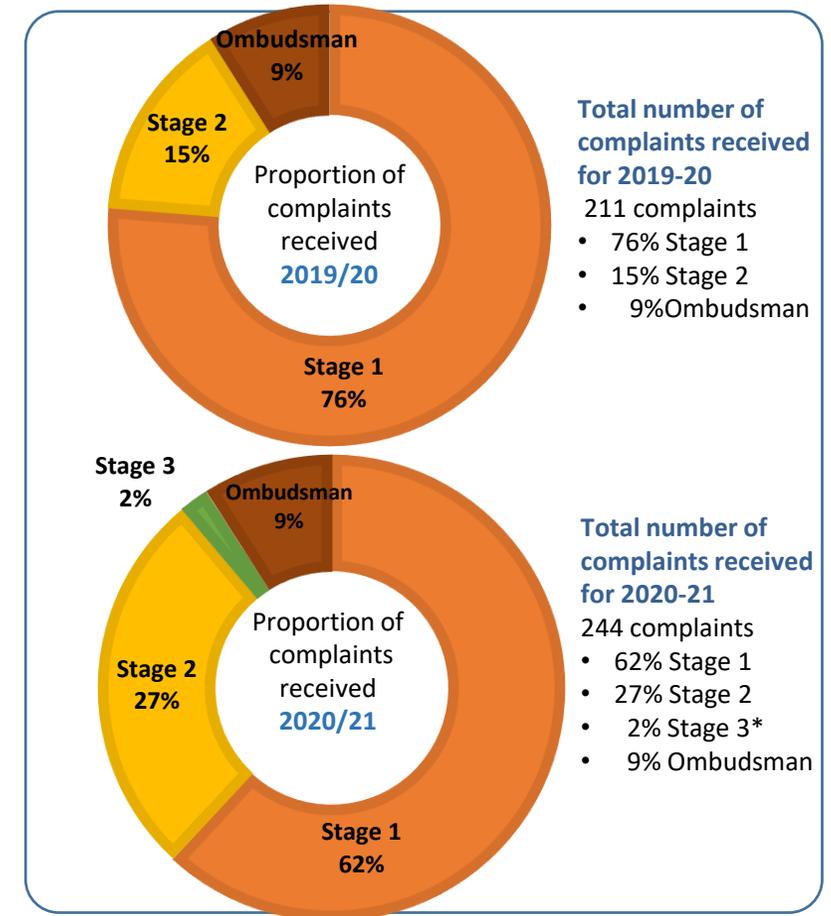


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Reporting is compared to previous Quarter

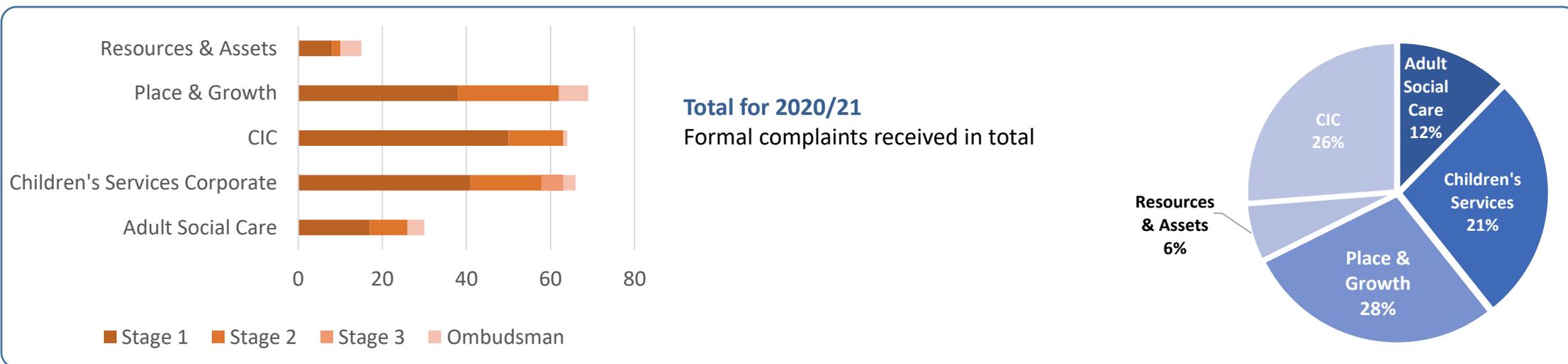
Period	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3*	Ombudsman	Total	Direction of Travel
Q1 2019/20	48	10	0	9	67	N/A
Q2 2019/20	41	7	0	2	50	Improved
Q3 2019/20	38	10	0	2	50	Static
Q4 2019/20	34	4	0	6	44	Improved
Year end 2019/20	161	31	0	19	211	N/A
Q1 2020/21	20	7	1	3	31	Improved
Q2 2020/21	38	14	1	6	59	Stabilising
Q3 2020/21	45	22	2	9	78	Worsening
Q4 2020/21	48	23	1	4	76	Stabilising
Year end 2020/21	151	66	5	22	244	N/A

- There was a decrease in the number of complaints requiring a Stage 1 response.
- There was an increase in the number of complaints at Stage 2. Key themes for escalation were a lack of transparency in decision making and a sense that the Council was indifferent to customer concerns.
- Contact by the Ombudsman increased in the second Quarter as the Ombudsman Service restarted investigating complaints.



Formal Complaints | Directorates

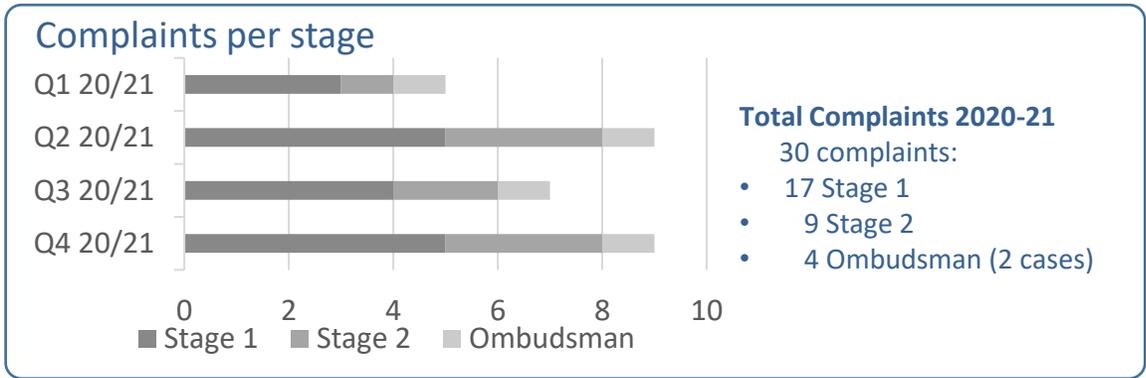
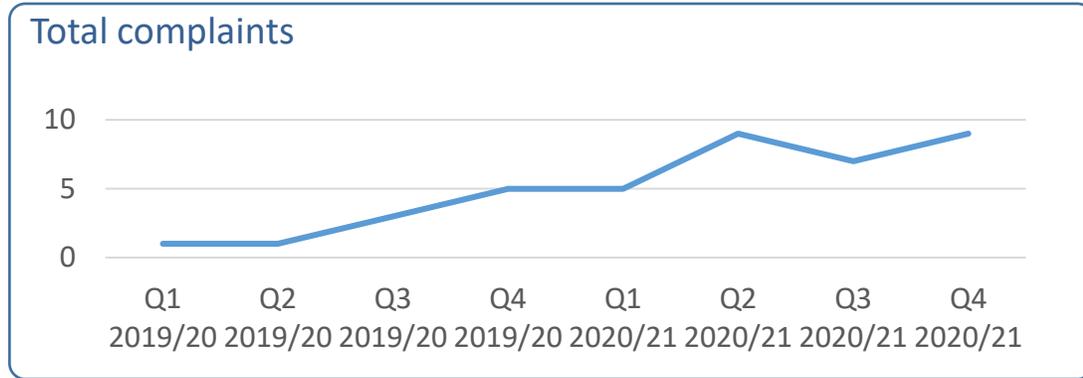
Housing Services moved to Communities, Insight and Change (CIC). This accounts for the decrease in complaints for Resources & Assets and an increase for CIC.



- 30 **ASC** complaints were managed throughout the year, 17 at Stage 1, 9 at Stage 2. 2 complaints were received by the Ombudsman and investigated. In the main these centred around how the Service made and communicated decisions regarding assessment and care provision.
- 69 **Place and Growth** complaints were managed in the year, 38 at Stage 1, 24 at Stage 2. The Ombudsman received 7 complaints related to **Place & Growth**, of which 3 were investigated and the other 4 either redirected back to the Council's own procedure or not investigated. Dissatisfaction centred on opposition to planning application approvals and traffic management decisions. Residents had a sense that their opinions had not been considered.
- 15 **Resources & Assets** were managed throughout the year. The complaints received by the Ombudsman were either not upheld or investigated further after initial assessment.
- 64 **CIC** complaints were managed throughout the year. The majority of complaints related to Housing Services and unhappiness about delays with regard to maintenance repairs or the quality of service offered.
- 66 **Children's Services'** complaints were managed throughout the year. 61% came from Social Care and the remaining 39% being made up of Corporate complaints. The Corporate complaints related to the SEN Service (20) and School Transport (6).

Formal Complaints | ASC

Compared to the previous year, the number of complaints increased in 2020/21. This increase was largely as a result of improved complaints reporting. Whilst complaints centred on decisions in relation to care assessments, the service received twice as many assessments, compared to 2019/20.



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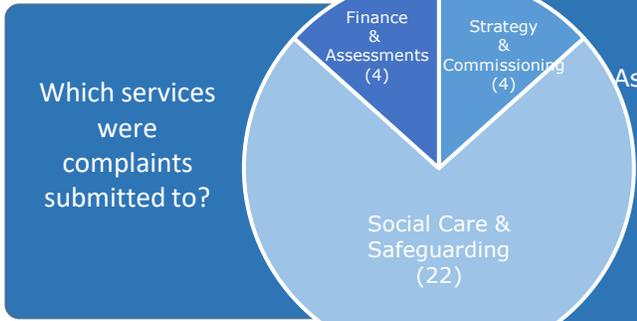
How did we receive the complaints?

0

Via letter

30

Via email



What were our residents dissatisfied with?

Assessment Decision

12

Non-Compliance

4

Financial Assessment

3

Quality of Service

4

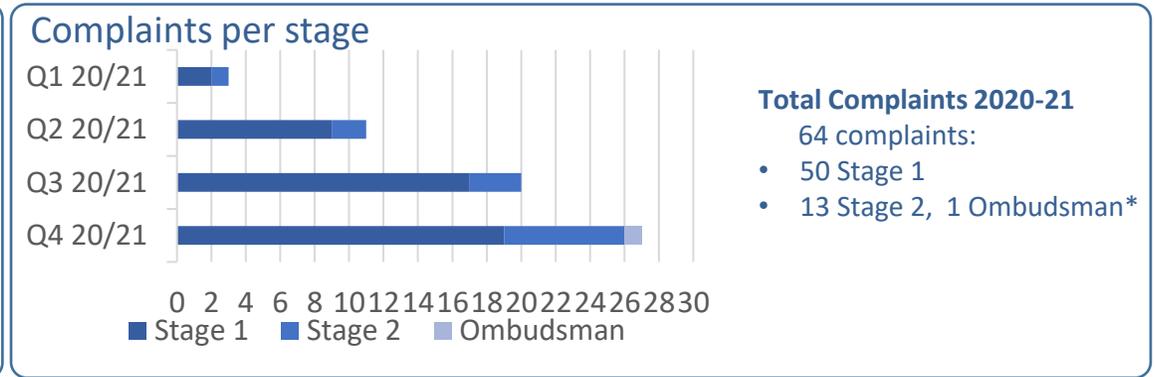
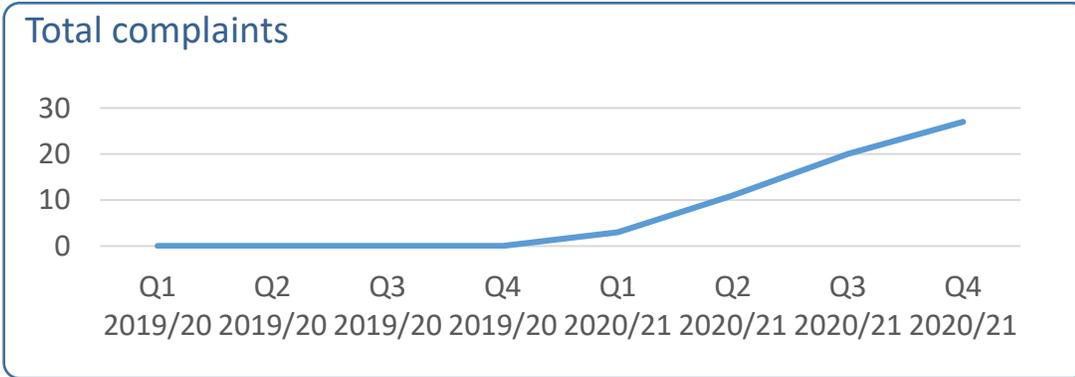
Lack of Support

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- 5 complaints were resolved outside the formal complaints process.
- Safeguarding complaints mainly centred on how assessment decisions were reached and whether the Council should or should not have intervened. Most of these complaints were resolved at Stage 1 or informally.
- The Service acknowledged that in some instances, there were opportunities to:
 - Improve how external partners received communication on decisions regarding care and assessment outcomes. For example, concerns over clinical decisions.
 - improve the reporting of significant concerns and events.
- The Strategy and Commissioning Team managed 2 complaints at Stage 1, with one escalating to Stage 2 over a period of 2 Quarters. These complaints came from a social care provider and centred on their differing interpretation of national guidance to that of the Council.
- Neither of the Ombudsman cases were upheld. In both instances, the investigator was satisfied by the thoroughness of the safeguarding enquiry.

Formal Complaints | Communities, Insight & Change

In the fourth quarter, Housing Services moved from Resources & Assets to CIC.



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How did we receive the complaints?

- 0** Via letter
- 64** Via email/web site

Which services were complaints submitted to?

Service	Number of Complaints
Housing Services	56
Locality Services	5
Customer Delivery	2
Website Team	1

What were our residents dissatisfied with?

- 14** Decision
- 30** Maintenance repairs
- 15** Lack of communication
- 5** Quality of Service

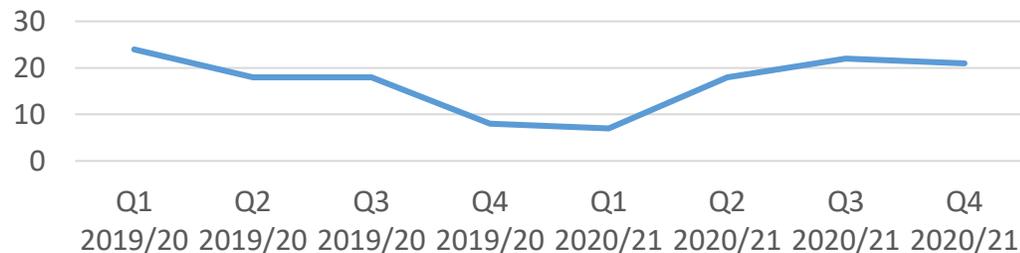
- **36** complaints were resolved outside the formal complaints process.
- Complaints for Housing Services centred mainly on the management of maintenance repairs. The Housing Customer Care team issued a letter to tenants in February regarding the impact of Lockdown measures on the completion of maintenance works. This communication would seem to have managed customer expectations as maintenance related complaints dropped in March. The Housing Needs Service also received complaints about decisions on homelessness applications.
- Customer Delivery received a complaint concerning time frames associated with a FOI request. Improvements have since been made to internal processes.
- Locality Services received quality of Service complaints about libraries and the closure of toilets in the town centre, during relaxation of the 2nd lockdown.
- The 1 Ombudsman investigation has yet to be decided on but related to the suitability of accommodation offered to a resident the Council owed a main homelessness duty to. The Service have recently informed the Ombudsman that the case was reviewed, and although the homelessness duty was discharged, social priority has now been awarded to reflect the households housing needs.

* As in previous slides the term Ombudsman refers to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). If a complaint is investigated by the Housing Ombudsman it will be noted as 'HO'. As a reminder the HO investigates matters of Housing management rather than Housing Needs.

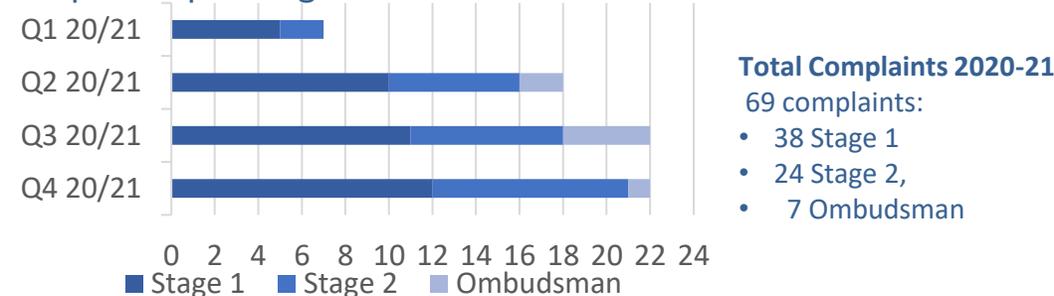
Formal Complaints | Place & Growth

Total number of complaints matched that received for 2019/20. Place & Growth resolved the highest number of complaints outside the formal process. A bench marking exercise comparing the ratio of complaints to Planning applications amongst Berkshire Authorities show that Wokingham receives a higher number of applications, but fewer complaints about Planning

Total complaints



Complaints per stage



6

How did we receive the complaints?

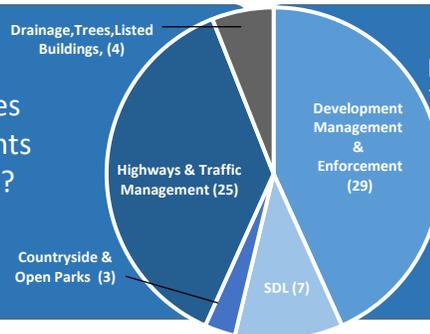


4 Via Website



65 Via email

Which services were complaints submitted to?



What were our residents dissatisfied with?

Decision/lack of transparency in process



45

Inadequate communication



12

Road Safety Issue



4

Quality of Service

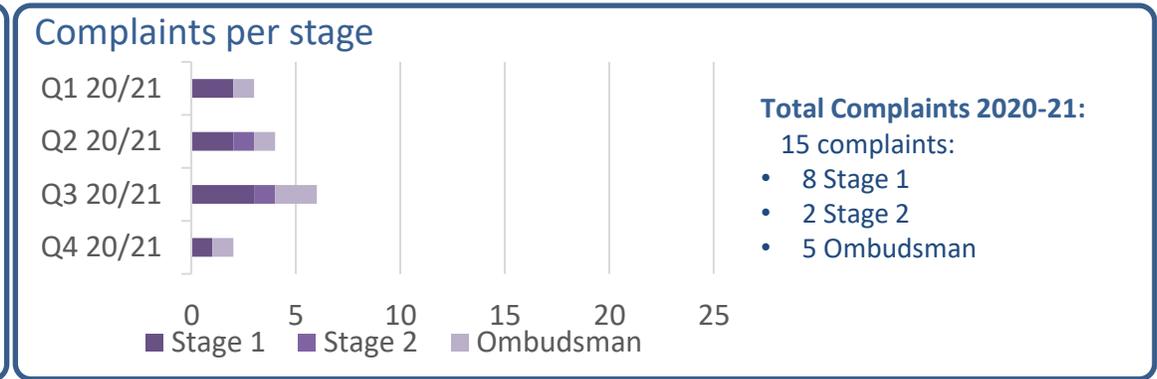
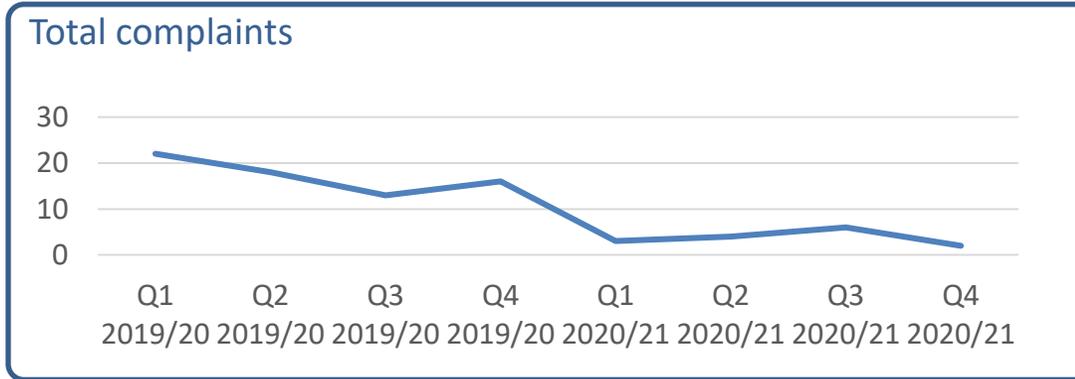


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- **61** complaints were resolved outside the formal complaints process.
- Residents perception was that the Council favoured development over privacy from neighbours. Customers also felt that explanations were overly technical..
- The Complaints received for SDL, centred on the rationale for decisions made and a sense that there was a lack of transparency in communication. These complaints were not upheld and rested on a difference of opinion rather than evidence of maladministration. However, the Service acknowledged the possibility of reviewing how residents were communicated to.
- Development Management complaints came from neighbours expressing dissatisfaction over the approval of a planning application. To mitigate this, additional information was uploaded to the website on the decision making process for planning applications. A bench marking exercise comparing the ratio of complaints to applications amongst Berkshire Authorities show that Wokingham receives a higher number of applications and fewer complaints. Development Management has direct contact with around one third of households in the Borough annually regarding 4000 applications and the dissatisfaction expressed through complaints relates to less than 1% of decisions made on applications.
- Many Traffic Management complaints arose from responses to requests for greater traffic controls. As part of the learning around drafting responses, the TM team is taking a more structured approach to dealing with complaints. It is hoped this will enable customer's to feel their concerns have been understood but at the same time made aware of the Local Authority's statutory limits.

Formal Complaints | Resources & Assets

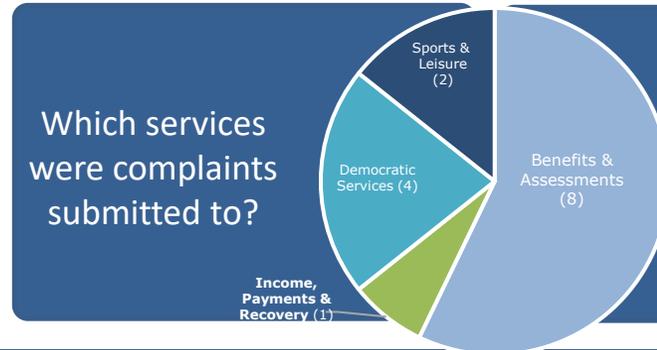
Overall the number of complaints was lower than the previous year as Housing transferred over to CIC.



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How did we receive the complaints?

0 Via letter
 15 Via email



What were our residents dissatisfied with?

Assessment decision: 11

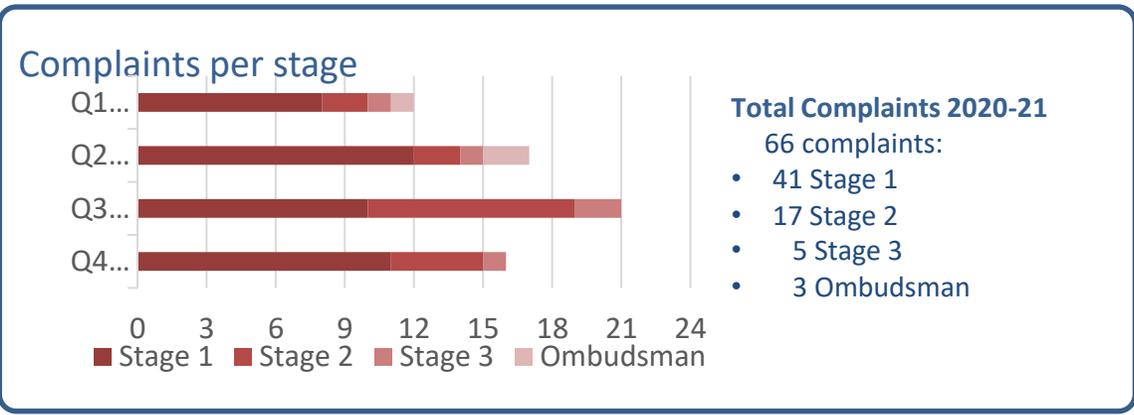
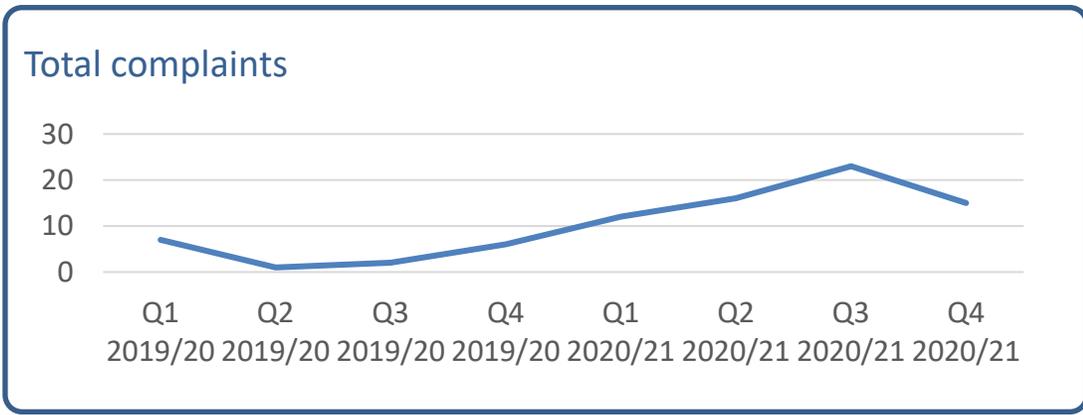
Process: 1

Inadequate communication: 3

- 5 complaints were reported to have been resolved outside the formal complaints process.
- 1 Stage 1 Resources & Assets complaint related to a customer receiving conflicting information about the collection process following a summons notice. This resulted in an apology and the team manager noting that there was a missed opportunity to discuss payment options and guidance on Retail relief.
- Complaints issued to Democratic Services centred on conduct and inappropriate communication. Neither of these were upheld.
- The Ombudsman complaints were not investigated as it had no legal remit to investigate the matters or another resolution body existed.
- The Sports & Leisure complaints were not upheld and related to the booking policy of group classes at Places Leisure.
- 1 of the Benefit complaints was partially upheld. This related to the Service not offering an adequate level of communication following a customer's query. The Service recognised the unnecessary frustration caused and took appropriate management action.

Formal Complaints | Children's Services

Compared to the previous year the number of complaints increased in 2020/21. This increase was largely as a result of improved complaints reporting.



Total Complaints 2020-21
66 complaints:

- 41 Stage 1
- 17 Stage 2
- 5 Stage 3
- 3 Ombudsman

11

How did we receive the complaints?

- 0** Via letter
- 66** Via email

Which services were complaints submitted to?

Service	Number of Complaints
Social Care	40
SEN	20
CTU	6

What were our residents dissatisfied with?

Category	Number of Complaints
Accuracy of file	4
Assessment Decision	26
Safeguarding Concerns	2
Staff conduct	3
Inadequate communication	6

- 12 complaints were resolved outside the formal complaints process.
- SEN complaints related to delays in the annual review process and provision of EHCP's. This caused frustration for parents. The SEN Service reviewed internal processes and practices to ensure the systems in place were effective in improving the customer experience whilst fulfilling statutory obligations.
- CTU complaints centred on two matters. A parent raised safeguarding concerns about a school transport contractor. The other matter concerned the refund policy on bus fares, when an individual class was forced to isolate from school following a case report of Covid-19.
- Detailed information regarding Children's Social Care complaints will be provided in the Annual Statutory Children's Social Care complaint report. However, the Service reported that the reasons for complaints centred on disputes around the accuracy of information captured through assessments, decisions coming out of assessments, and dissatisfaction with service user engagement.

CUSTOMER COMPLIMENTS

"This is fantastic work, really well done! I love the words and pictures approach, so clear and informative, as is the court info! How useful for a young person to have an index of acronyms and explanation of our complicated processes."

February 2021, Manager feedback for ASYE Social Worker

Just want to say how good the team was I've had to fit my bathroom. Both of them were very professional, polite and nothing was too much trouble.

January 2021 Biocraft Housing contractor

"Just a quick note to say we very much appreciate the approval of our planning permission ...and the balanced way the matter has been handled. You have no idea how much of a positive lift this has been in the midst of a tough lock down with the difficulties of home schooling and remote working"

January 2021 Development Management

"Thank you so much to the agent who helped me this afternoon. He was very concise and clarified what was needed in order to navigate through validating an application - we are very grateful."

January 2021 Development Management

"I had the pleasure of working with the SW on a few occasions and found her to be a delight to work with. She was extremely professional and very skilled"

March 2021, family feedback to Ambleside Social Worker

"thank you all personally for all the help in securing myself and family to this temporary accommodation. You are a lovely team and well done for not allowing your standards drop through these unprecedented times as have so many officers"

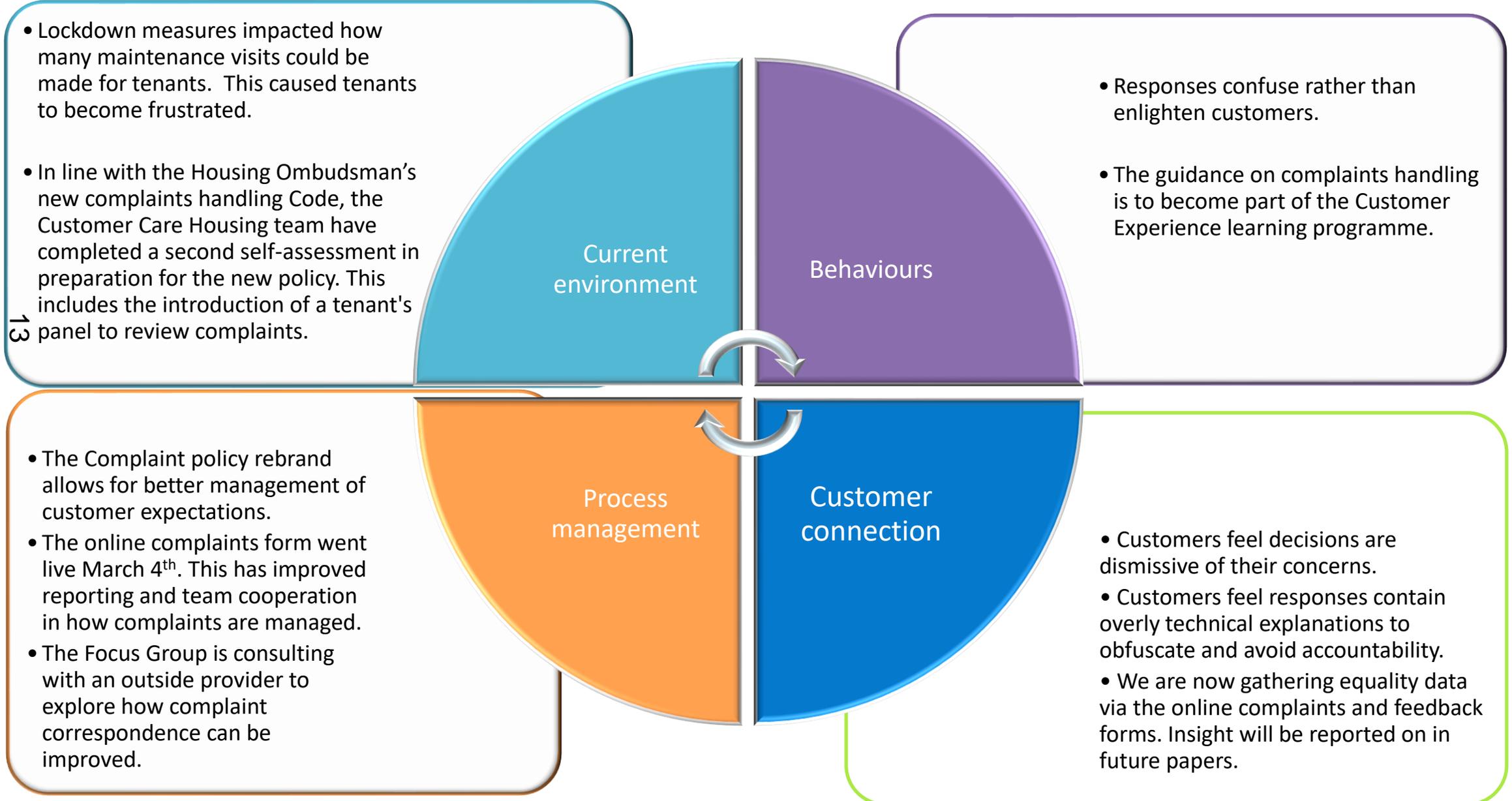
March 2021, Housing Needs Team

"The Social Worker was very professional and sympathetic and was persistent in trying to advise the level of support that I needed. She understood that my situation was evolving throughout the last year or so"

February 2021 Social Work Team



Formal Complaints | Insight



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