

Formal Complaints – Annual Report Summary 2021/22

Audit Committee July 2022



Annual Report | Executive Summary

71% of complaints were resolved early without formal escalation to Stage 1.

Deliverables and business context for 2021-22

- Increase in business partnering to review complaints, and identify further support and training
- Adult Social Care (ASC) and Place and Growth (P&G) invested in a complaints resource to support effective complaint management
- A new online complaints form streamlined the way people register a complaint. This has improved how we manage complaints and capture learnings
- Customers rated the handling of complaints as **'good'** in the satisfaction survey
- Complaints are becoming increasingly more complex and challenging:
 - ✓ Complainants use a recent experience of poor service, to relay a number of past and sometimes unrelated issues
 - ✓ Complaints often crossed many services
 - ✓ An increased need to refer complainants to the persistent complainant policy
- Place & Growth received 34% of all complaints, followed by Housing (within P&G), at 29%
- Most complaints resolved at Stage 1 related to inadequate service or poor communication
- Stage 2 escalations centred on unhappiness with an assessment or policy decision

Directorate	Total Formal	Early Resolution
ASC	34	42
Chief Executive Office	0	7
Housing	86	154
Children's Services	68	45
Place & Growth	104	156
Resources & Assets	13	23
TOTALS	305	427

What is the learning...

- Clear communication about process and procedures will help to better manage customer expectations, particularly around the limits of the Council's statutory powers
- Knowledge of the complaints policy results in Service ownership and more robust early resolution / Stage 1 responses. This means fewer Stage 2 escalation requests
- Following the complaints process leads to better complaints handling. Copying in numerous colleagues into complaints received by email causes confusion and delays in handling.

Key actions completed 2021/22:

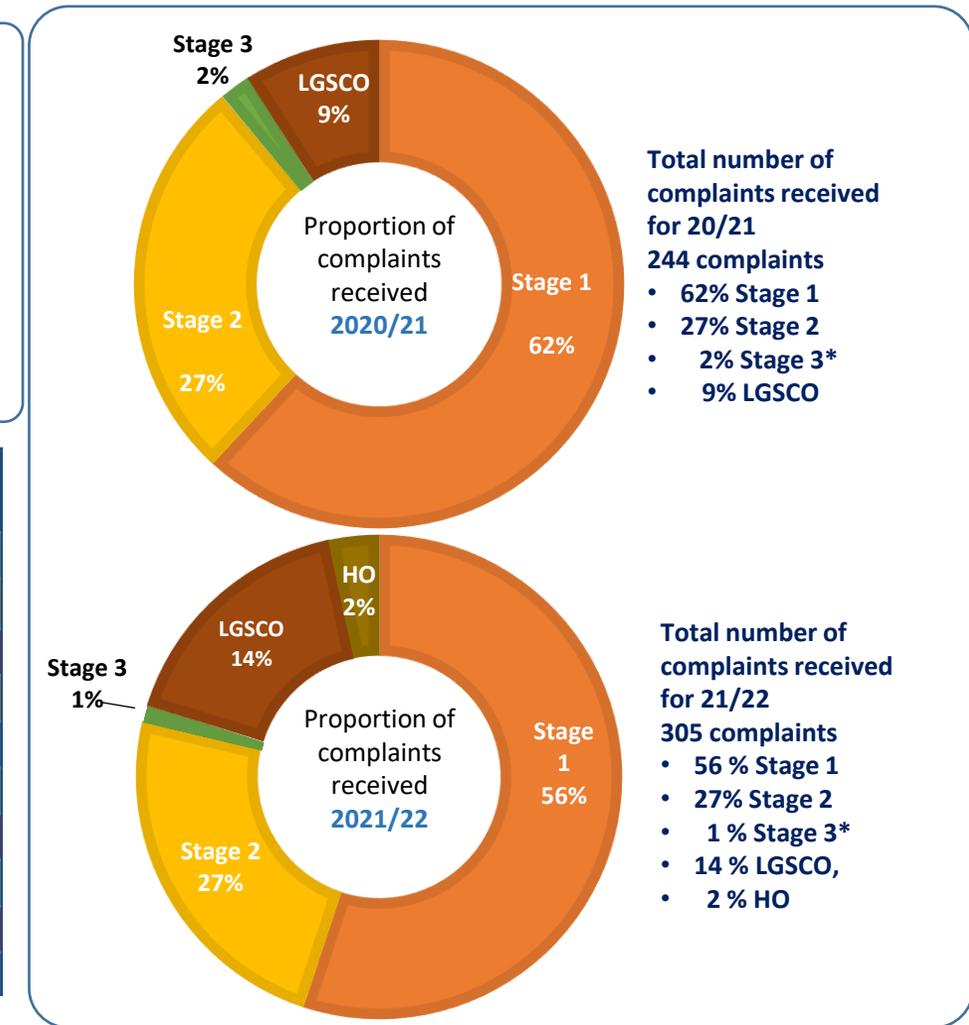
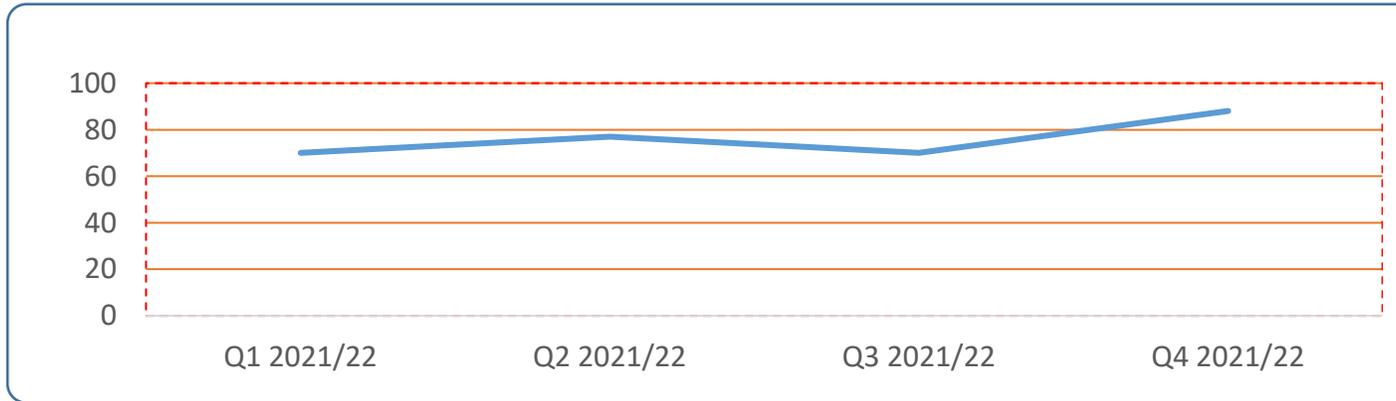
- New online complaints form to better manage and record complaints
- Embedding of pro-active complaints handling
- Recruitment completed to enable better co-ordination of complaint responses
- LGSCO delivering complaints training across directorates
- Design of 3 C's principles (see appendix)

Areas of focus for 2022/23:

- Survey to gather customer/colleague feedback around the 3 C's principles
- Train teams on 3 C's approach, cascade guidance and train quality assessors
- Re-write complaint policy using 3 C's principles
- Work with Children's Services around complaint handling in SEND
- Detailed analysis of impact around the changes proposed by the Housing Ombudsman

Formal Complaints | Volumes

The number of formal complaints handled in 2021/22 was 305 (from 203 individual customers) this was an increase of 61, compared to 2020/21. The rise may have been as a result of customers feeling more confident to submit a complaint, post COVID. The council managed 20 more cases in 2021/22, throughout the year from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). This increase appears to be consistent with other local authority experiences as the LGSCO worked through a backlog of cases.



Period	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3*	LGSCO	Housing Ombudsman	Total	RAG Direction of Travel
Q1 2020/21	20	7	1	3	n/a	31	Green
Q2 2020/21	38	14	1	6	n/a	59	Yellow
Q3 2020/21	45	22	2	9	n/a	78	Red
Q4 2020/21	48	23	1	4	n/a	76	Yellow
Year end 2020/21	151	66	5	22		244	
Q1 2021/22	46	17	1	6	0	70	Green
Q2 2021/22	41	25	0	11	0	77	Red
Q3 2021/22	38	19	0	10	3	70	Green
Q4 2021/22	48	21	1	15	3	88	Red
Year end 2021/22	173	82	2	42	6	305	

*Complaints at Stage 3 only apply to Children's statutory social care

- Of the 203 individual complaint cases submitted in 2021/22, 173 were responded at Stage 1, a rise of 22 cases compared to 2020/21. In the same period, the Council managed an increase in the number of Stage 2 requests from 66 to 82. The Council managed 42 LGSCO inquiries in 2021/22, an increase of 20 cases compared to 2020/21. For context:
 - 3 cases found the Council to be at fault, requiring an apology, financial payment and/or recommended amendments to procedures.
 - 3 cases found the Council to have provided a suitable remedy to the injustice caused, and 1 investigation did not find fault.
 - 21 cases did not merit an investigation and 10 cases are still to be determined. The Housing Ombudsman found fault in 1 case, and has yet to reach a decision on 3 cases.

Formal Complaints | Directorates and service areas

The distribution of complaints was similar in 2020/21, with volumes received for each Directorate remaining very similar.



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- **34 ASC** complaints were managed throughout the year, 21 at Stage 1, 9 at Stage 2. 4 complaints were received by the LGSCO and 2 were investigated. Most complaints related to quality of service (delays in care assessments), inadequate communication or disputes over how decisions were reached.
- **104 Place and Growth** complaints were managed in the year, 52 at Stage 1 and 39 at Stage 2. Of the 13 LGSCO complaints, most were not investigated because there was insufficient evidence of fault or injustice caused to the complainant. Complaints mainly related to how the Council considered a planning application or managed concerns relating to a building/highway development.
- **13 Resources & Assets** were managed in the year, 6 at Stage 1 and 6 at Stage 2. The LGSCO considered 3 individual complaints and only investigated one, with the decision finding in favour of the Council's decision.
- **68 Children's Services** complaints were managed throughout the year. 47% came from Social Care, a drop from 61% in the previous year. Complaints against the SEND team made up 41%, with the other Corporate complaints related School admissions (3%), Short breaks team (3%) and Education Welfare (6%). The complaints mainly centred on differences of opinion to assessment/application outcomes, delays in assessments and untimely poor communication in responding to concerns.

Complaints Insight | 2021/22



Environment

- The LGSCO improved their Online Complaint Service. They have accelerated the assessment process and the speed decisions are made.
- The Housing maintenance and care sector experienced challenges in recruitment, leading to delays in the completion of tenant repairs and care assessments.
- A rise in public interest of open spaces, trees and landscapes, resulting in a greater focus on the protection of trees.



Ownership

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- Service Managers and Assistant Directors ownership for complaints in their areas, makes it easier to get complaints to the right person.
- CLT support in cascading messages around the importance of effective complaint handling has resulted in improvements in ownership taking.
- ASC and Place & Growth invested in resources to improve complaint handling and responses.



Customer Expectations

- Some customers confuse a decision they find disagreeable, with poor performance. These complaints make up most Stage 2 escalations.
- Dissatisfaction around the quality of service offered was mainly in relation to Housing maintenance repairs and time taken to resolve issues. Customer Journey mapping sessions have been held to identify improvements, and a plan for action is being created along with timescales.
- Ensuring information is updated on the website and that it is clear, helps to manage customer expectations.

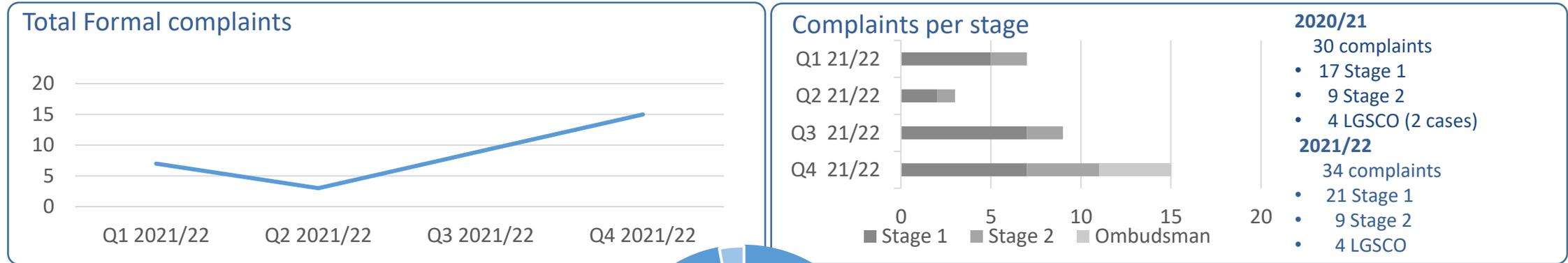


Suggested Improvements

- Training was delivered by the LGSCO in May on effective complaints handling with complaints representatives from all directorates.
- Software was introduced to simplify how we manage complaints. This provided opportunities to streamline and automate processes.
- The 3 C's principles (Care, Clarity, Confidence) were developed and will be launched and embedded throughout 2022/23.

Formal Complaints – ASC

43 complaints were resolved informally. The number of formal complaints managed increased by 4. Out of the 4 LGSCO cases, 2 were not investigated and 2 are still to be determined.



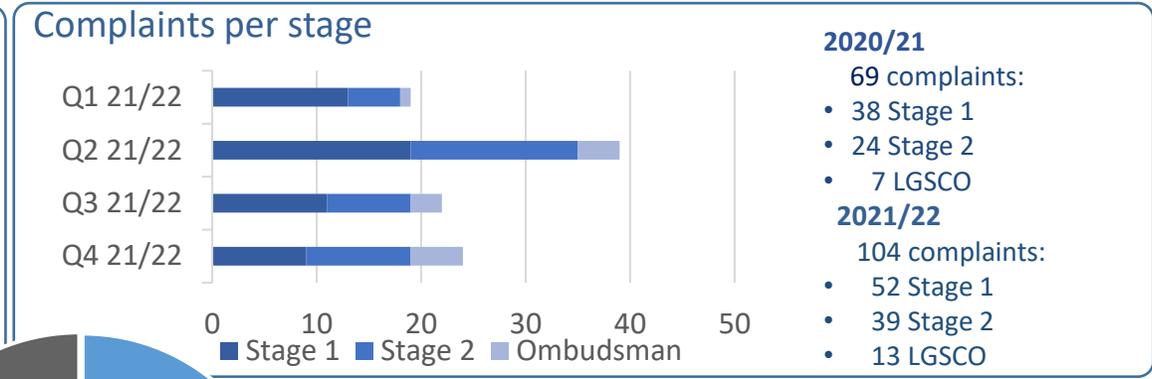
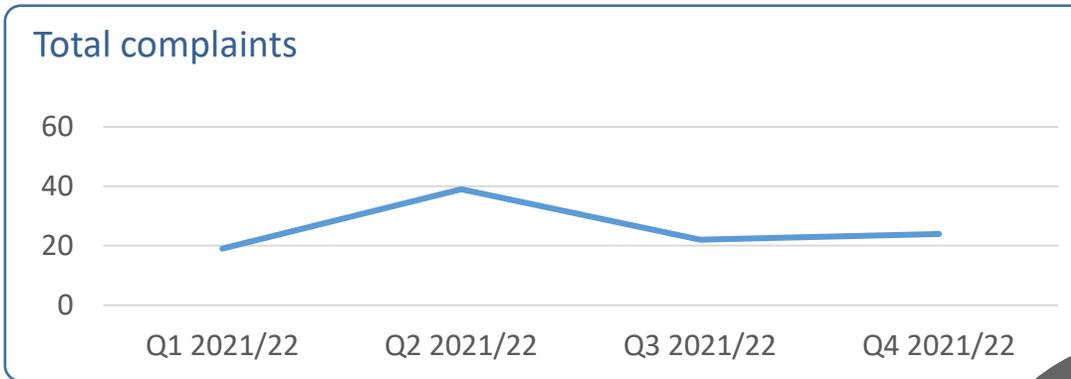
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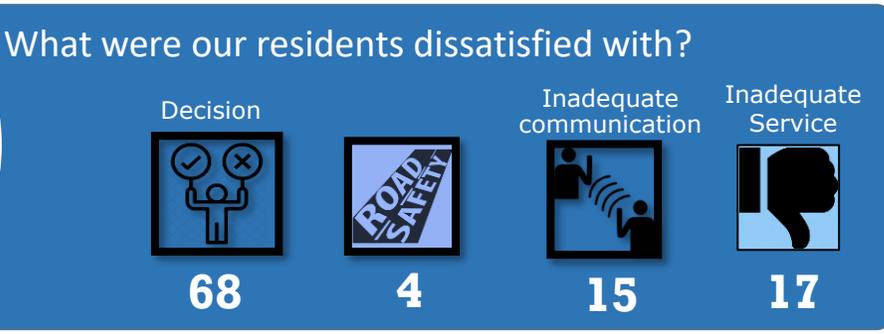
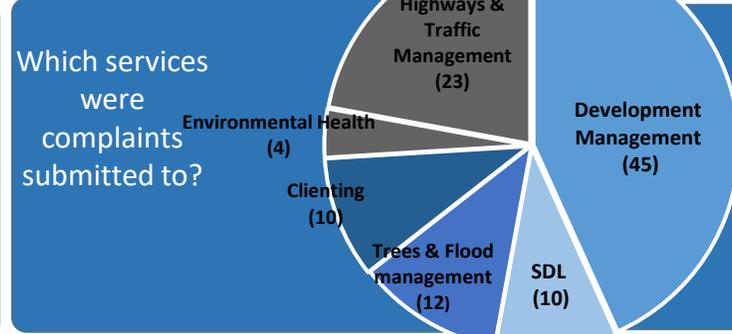
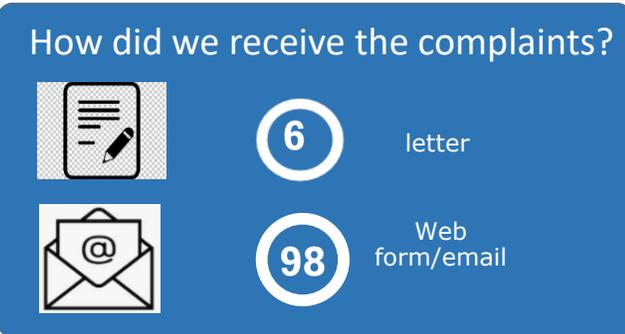
- The Service resolved **42** complaints outside the formal complaints process. There were **21** individual cases.
- Complaints upheld at Early Resolution and Stage 1, related to inadequate service or communication. Those escalated to Stage 2 were mainly a repeat of previous concerns with responses needing a fuller explanation. 2 LGSCO cases were not investigated and another 2 are still to be determined.
- The Service received 2372 telephone calls in the quarter, and of the 58 customers who completed the Gov Metric feedback survey, 66% reported a positive or average experience. Causes for negative feedback concerned lack of communication or having to complain about the service.

Formal Complaints | Place & Growth

156 complaints were resolved informally. The majority of cases centre on a difference of opinion rather than service failure. 12 LGSCO cases were not investigated, and 1 is still to be determined.



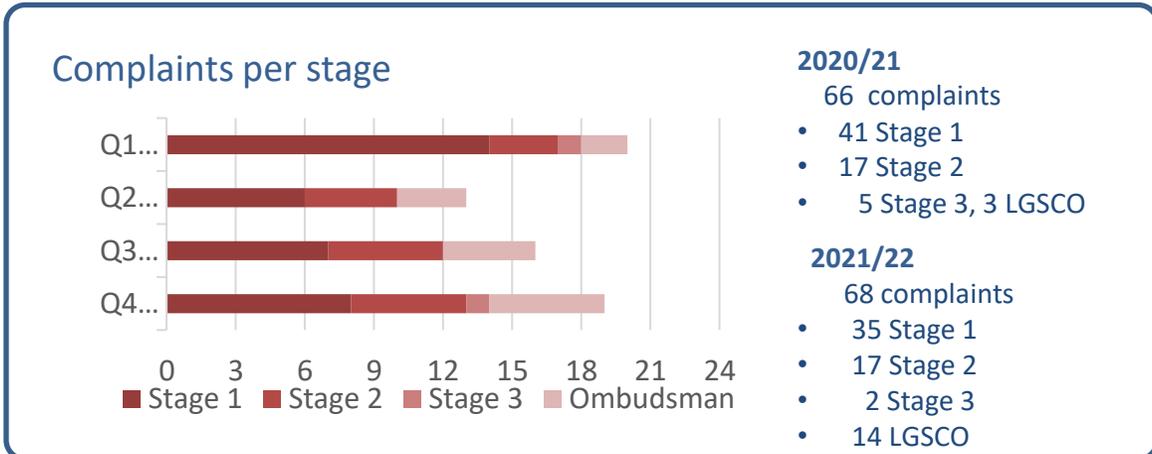
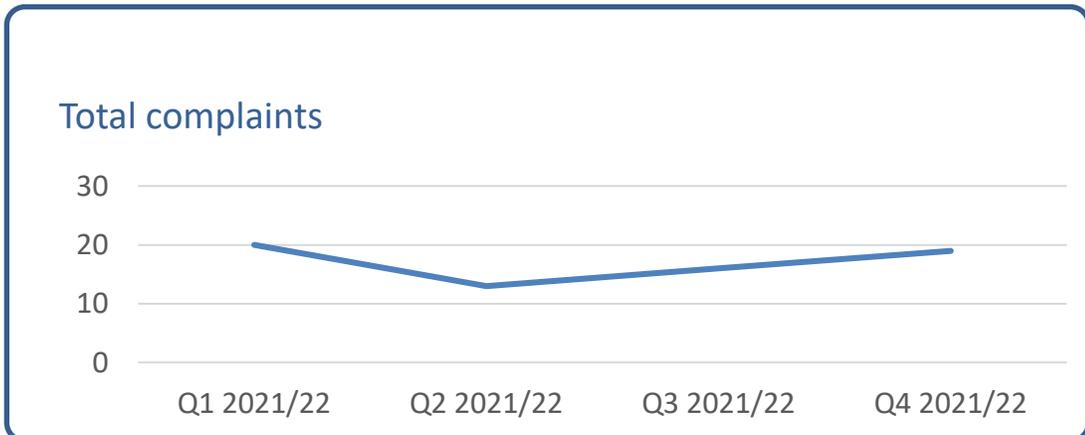
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- **156** complaints (65% of all complaints received), were resolved outside the formal complaints process. The Service managed **75** individual cases.
- Complaints for Development Management centre on challenges to Planning decisions. Those expressing dissatisfaction to the 4000 planning applications decided annually, remain very low. Over the past year, 26,000 notifications were issued to residents and most complaints were not upheld, as the decision was issued appropriately, and no evidence of fault was found.
- Lack of customer awareness around what Services are responsible for and what customers expect. As a result, the Service is reviewing information published online, to ensure information is clear and in one place.
- As part of the Customer Excellence Programme, Customer Journey mapping sessions are being held to identify where improvements could be made, so customers have a better experiences when interacting with Highways.

Formal Complaints | Children's Services

45 complaints were resolved informally.

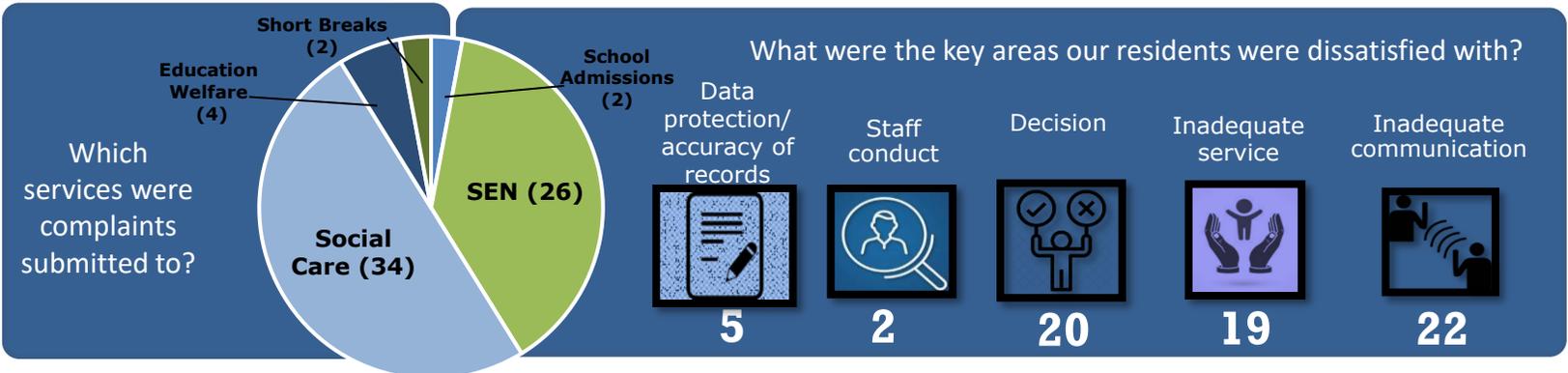


2020/21
66 complaints

- 41 Stage 1
- 17 Stage 2
- 5 Stage 3, 3 LGSCO

2021/22
68 complaints

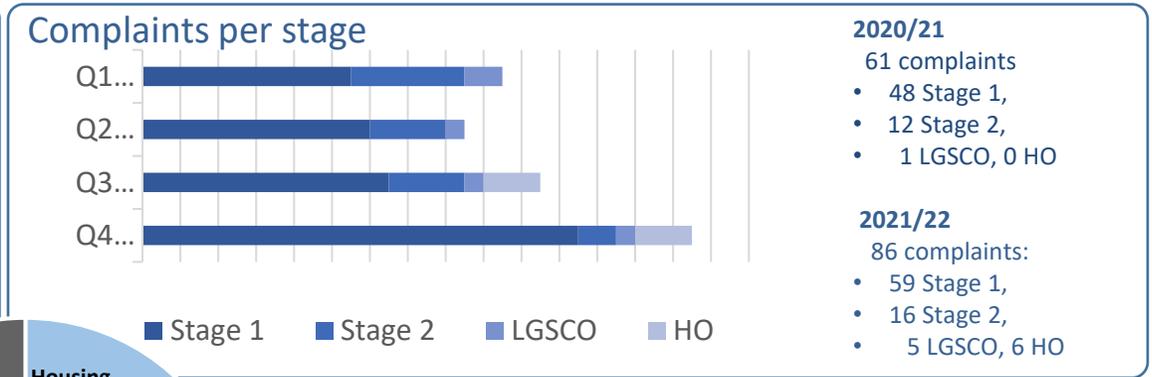
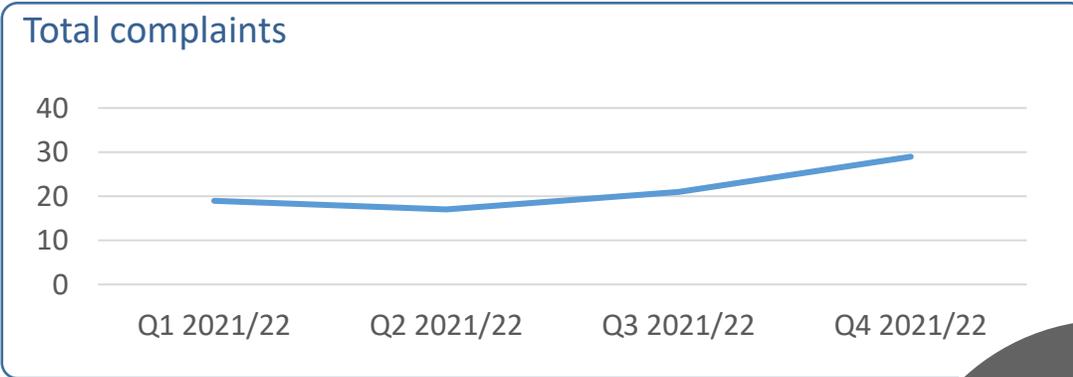
- 35 Stage 1
- 17 Stage 2
- 2 Stage 3
- 14 LGSCO



- 45 complaints (40%) were resolved outside the formal complaints process. The Service managed 41 individual cases (19 SEND, 19 Social Care and 3 additional Corporate cases).
- For Children's Social Care, 2021-'22 has seen an increase in the volumes of cases resolved informally and a decrease of formal stage one cases, due to social care teams' commitment to discussing cases upfront. The numbers of stage two and three escalations have remained consistent with the previous year. There were no 'outliers' in terms of the teams that received complaints, which were evenly spread.
- The nature of cases were mostly in connection to alleged inaccuracies with assessment reports and the decisions reached by social care teams; the low volumes does not highlight any systemic issues.
- Complaints against SEND centre on delays in completion of EHC plans and/or their annual review

Formal Complaints | Housing

154 complaints were resolved informally. The number of formal complaints managed increased by 25. 2 LGSCO cases spanned over several quarters, with one being upheld and another not investigated. Of the 3 Housing Ombudsman cases, spanning over several quarters, 1 was considered premature, and 2 are still to be determined.



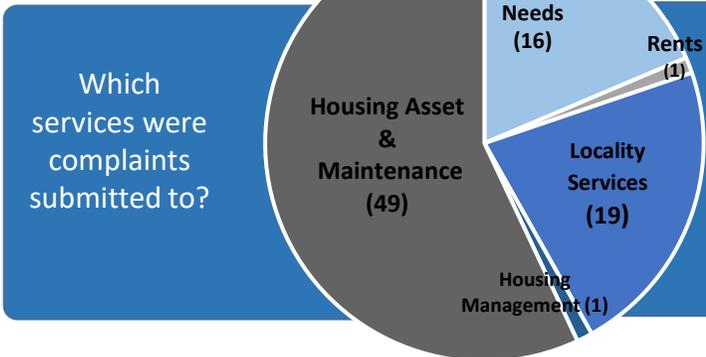
2020/21
61 complaints

- 48 Stage 1,
- 12 Stage 2,
- 1 LGSCO, 0 HO

2021/22
86 complaints:

- 59 Stage 1,
- 16 Stage 2,
- 5 LGSCO, 6 HO

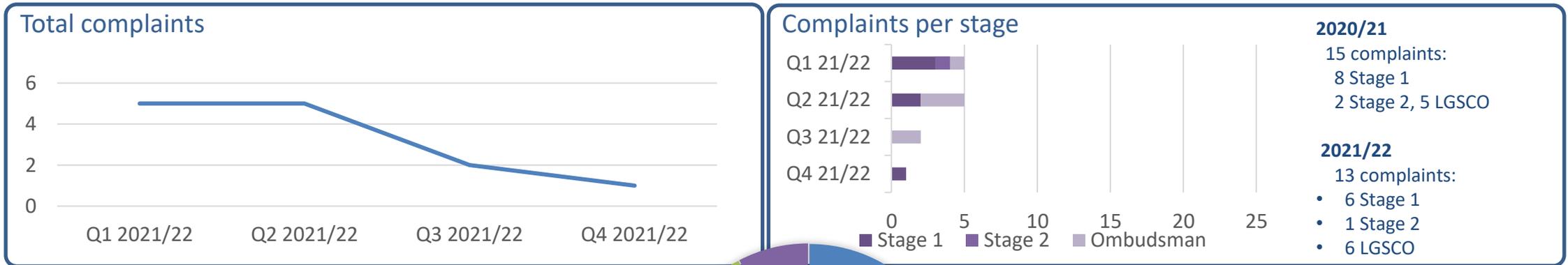
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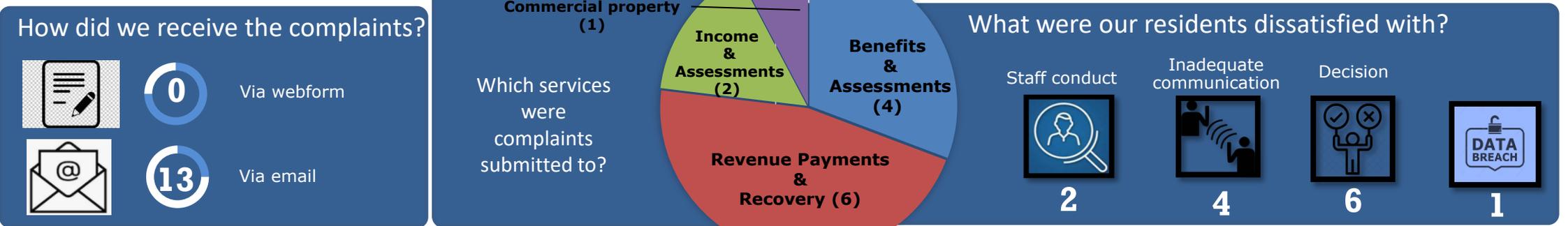
- **154** (64%), were resolved early. There were **60** individual complaint cases.
- Complaints tend to be complex.
- An LGSCO case (received Qtr.4 2020/21) reached a final decision. Fault was identified in how the Council managed a request to review the suitability of accommodation offered to a homelessness applicant. A financial payment was and apology was actioned. The Service also agreed to consider whether it owed the client a statutory housing duty.
- One HO case is under investigation, another case is still being assessed and one was considered premature.
- As part of the Customer Excellence Programme, Customer Journey mapping sessions have been held to identify improvements, and a plan for action is being created to support improvements in customer experiences when interacting with Housing maintenance services.

Formal Complaints | Resources & Assets

23 complaints were resolved informally. The number of formal complaints managed fell by 2. The fall may be attributed with teams better informed about the complaints process. The 3 LGSCO cases spanned over several quarters, with 1 not upheld, another not investigated and 1 considered out of scope.



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- **23** cases (64%) were resolved outside the formal complaints process. **6** individual cases were formally processed. The LGSCO cases were either not investigated or not upheld.
- In Q1, a Stage 1 Council Tax benefit complaint escalated to Stage 2 but was not investigated further, as it had already been upheld.
- One Ombudsman complaint concerned a decision not to approve a Coronavirus – Tier 4 Business Grant. This was not upheld. Another LGSCO case was not investigated because the complainant had gone to the First Tier Tribunal and no other aspect of the complaint fell within the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction. Similarly, another case was not investigated, because the complaint did not fall within their remit.

CUSTOMER COMPLIMENTS

Thank you and very well done, believe me when I say that you and your team's continued efforts are appreciated by many local residents and users of the Coombes, even if they do not say so directly

October 2021, Development Management

That's great news and really helpful. We look forward to applying for our daughter in the next admission. Thanks

September 2021, School admissions

The young person was so positive about the Social Worker and was now feeling really hopeful about future support. I thought it important that this was passed on....the SG (special guardian) felt really listened to and supported.

September 2021, Children's Services Conifers Team

Thank you for your prompt response to my appeal and also for the action taken by you.

This problem was totally my fault, and I am sorry for the problem it caused. I fully understand why I was issued the notice, as your staff were carrying out their duties correctly

July 2021, Parking Services

I hardly know how to begin to thank you for all your kindness, in the things you provided, in the issues you addressed and your plans to help me in so many ways. I felt quite overwhelmed. It has been a bit of a struggle sometimes, but to speak to someone who not only understood, but who made helpful suggestions, was really great.

January 2022, ASC Brokerage & Professional Support

Our inspections were a pleasant experience. He was both knowledgeable and helpful and a great advocate for Wokingham Borough Council.

February 2022, Building Control

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Fantastic, always get a smile and they do a fantastic job

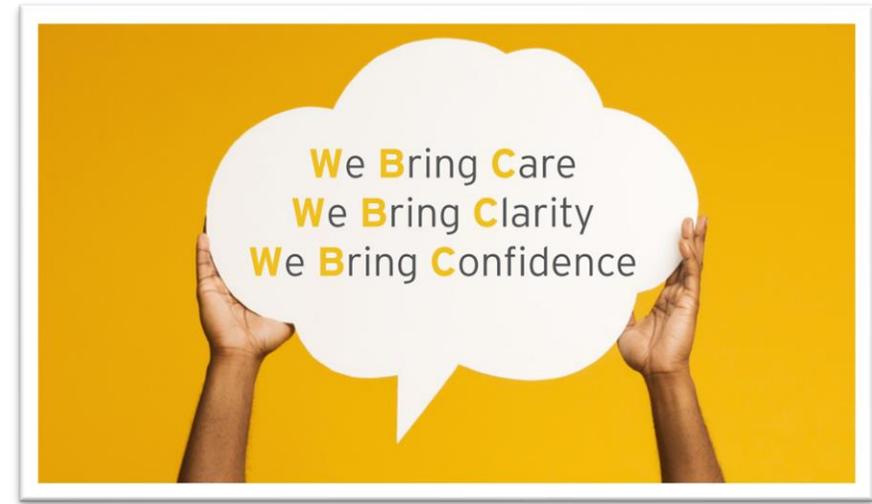
January 2022, Waste crew



APPENDIX | A new approach to communication

We have been working to improve the way we communicate. The 3 C's principles have been designed following staff and customer feedback.

The aim is to bring the human touch back into our communication, particularly when we are responding to complaints.



We Bring Care

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Did you:

- put their needs first, with the most important information upfront?
- show you know what's important to them and personalise the message where you can?
- write like you would talk to your neighbour, to sound human and warm?

Test the care

Read it out loud. Did it sound like you talking?

We Bring Clarity

Did you:

- use a clear format with headings, bullet points, short paragraphs, short sentences and white space?
- use clear words, with no jargon or technical language? Only use technical terms if you're certain your customer will understand them.
- use clear facts and figures that are as relevant, local and specific as possible to your customer?

Test the clarity

For the general public, aim for 65 or more on the readability test: www.thefirstword.co.uk/readabilitytest

We Bring Confidence

Did you:

- say what we can do, with positive statements and direct calls to action?
- say what you mean and stop there, with no waffle?
- write to you and say who's doing what using *I*, *we* and *they*, or names?

Test the confidence

Think about someone you know. Would they believe this message?