



## Annual Complaints Report 2021/2022

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the Council's performance on complaints as well as a summary of the findings from Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) decisions.
- 1.2 The total number of complaints received has increased from 1,293 in 20/21 to 1,862 in 21/22. This includes complaints that may have later been withdrawn or those that could not be accepted within the remit of the Council's complaints procedure. This increase was anticipated as the volume of complaints in 20/21 were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, 68% of Stage One complaints were responded to on time. This is a significant decrease from the 83% achieved in 20/21. Whilst there are several factors that have contributed to this (such as moving from a three stage to a two stage complaints procedure with reduced timescales at Stage One), Council Officers must prioritise dealing with complaints quickly and thoroughly; with the aim of answering 90% of all complaints on time.
- 1.3 In section 4 and 5 of the report, information about the Internal Audit's findings is provided. This concluded that Satisfactory Assurance could be given to residents, Senior Leaders and Members that there are effective controls in place to review, investigate, respond to and recompense complainants. Many of the findings of the Audit have also been observed during routine quality assurance activities, which has also highlighted other areas for development alongside some improvement in practice regarding complaint responses.
- 1.4 The main report concludes with a summary of what the organisation has learnt from complaints, how it has improved, themes that have been identified from compliments and an update on progress against priorities which had been set for 21/22. Finally, a new set of priorities is put forward to ensure the organisation strives for continuous improvement in its complaint handling practice.
- 1.5 Appendix A provides a summary of complaints received and investigated by the LGSCO and HOS. The LGSCO investigated 21 complaints and upheld 67% (14 out of 21). This is less than the previous year, where 78% of all complaints were upheld. It is also lower than the average in similar authorities, which was 71%.
- 1.6 Appendix B provides a summary of each Department's performance and more importantly the service improvements that have been introduced to demonstrate learning from complaints, such as improving information on the Council website, bespoke training to address specific Social Care issues and the introduction of virtual parking permits.
- 1.7 It is worth noting that the Council publishes its annual complaints report after receiving the LGSCO's Annual Review Letter which we received in July 2022.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Council previously had a three stage complaints procedure, with a target response time of 15 working days at each stage. On 1 April 2021, the Council replaced this with a two-stage complaints process; and a target response time of 10 working days at Stage One and 20 working days at Stage Two<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.2 To ensure that complaint responses still maintained a high level of quality with appropriate oversight from Senior Managers, the Council introduced the requirement for Heads of Service and Directors to approve Stage One and Two complaints, respectively. This may have inadvertently caused delays, and as a result the Corporate Complaints Team are reviewing the process. A recommendation to do this was made to EMT on 13 July 2022 and this was fully supported as set out in 4.7- 4.10.
- 2.3 Due to the change in process and timescales it is difficult to make reliable comparisons about the Council's performance. This is further compounded by the fact that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council saw a lower volume of complaints as normal service delivery had to change or needed to be suspended to deal with the challenges of the outbreak.

## **3. Performance analysis 21/22**

- 3.1 This section of the report provides information on complaint volumes, escalations to Stage Two, the outcome of complaints and the percentage of complaints responded to on time.
- 3.2 As statutory complaints about Adults and Children's Services have their own procedures, more detailed reports are produced and presented to Senior Management and the respective Cabinet Leads. Within this report, key performance data about the volumes and outcomes is included. Information about timeliness refers only to Stage One complaints, as Adult Social Care complaints only have a single stage, and statutory Stage Two and Three complaints for Children's Services have different timescales.
- 3.3 Of the total complaints received, 188 complaints could not be accepted within the complaints procedure and the breakdown of the reasons for this is shown in the table below. The volume of complaints that could not be accepted is consistent with volumes in 19/20.
- 3.4 Most of these 188 complaints were re-categorised as service requests. The Corporate Complaints Team introduced a new process in Autumn 2021 to increase scrutiny of enquiries to ensure that they are not inappropriately de-escalated. The main consideration is to determine if the resident is raising a question or making a first-time request. If this is the case, then they are still provided with information about how they can escalate their concerns. However, to determine if a query should be treated as a complaint, the Corporate Complaints Officer will look at whether:

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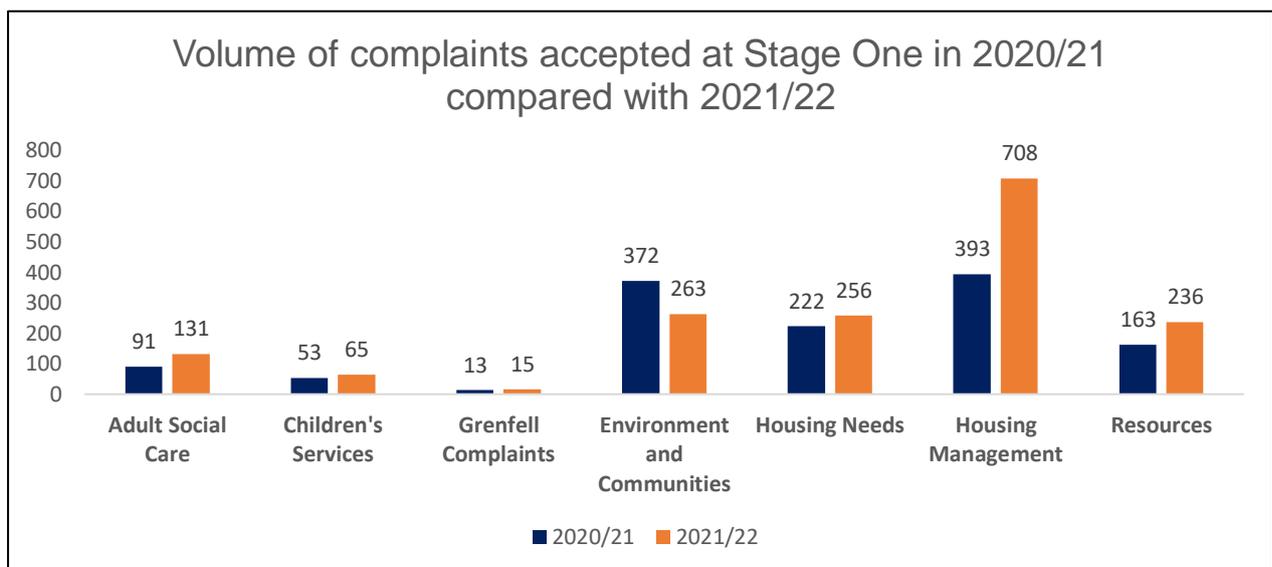
<sup>1</sup> [https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/howwegovern/keydecisions/reports/leadership%20team/2020-21/210317%20\(march\)/kd05867r.pdf](https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/howwegovern/keydecisions/reports/leadership%20team/2020-21/210317%20(march)/kd05867r.pdf)

- There has there been a delay which is either unreasonable or longer than the published timescale
- The complainant has raised concerns about the service they received or a decision the Council has made
- The Council has not delivered on an action it agreed to do
- The individual has complained about the issue before without a full resolution

3.5 This is also explained in the Council's Corporate Complaints and Compensation<sup>2</sup> policy so that the organisation is fully transparent with complainants.

Reason that complaint could not be accepted	Volume of complaints
Service request / enquiry - not a complaint	112
Appeal not a complaint, e.g., school admissions, Housing Review, PCN or Court of Law	20
Complaint not for this organisation	20
Duplicate complaint	12
Complaint about council policy	10
Customer has not responded to enquiries/is not contactable	5
Insurance claim	3
Complaint subject to legal proceedings	2
Customer refused to provide a name or address	2
Other	2
Insufficient information provided by customer	1
Persistent or vexatious	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>

3.6 Of the remaining 1,674 complaints which were accepted at Stage One of the complaints procedure, the volumes across each Department compared to 20/21 are provided in the chart below.



3.7 Grenfell complaints referenced in the chart are about the Dedicated Service Grenfell Housing Allocations and Grenfell Housing Services with 5, 2 and 8 complaints being received, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/media/document/rbkc-corporate-complaints-and-compensation-policy>

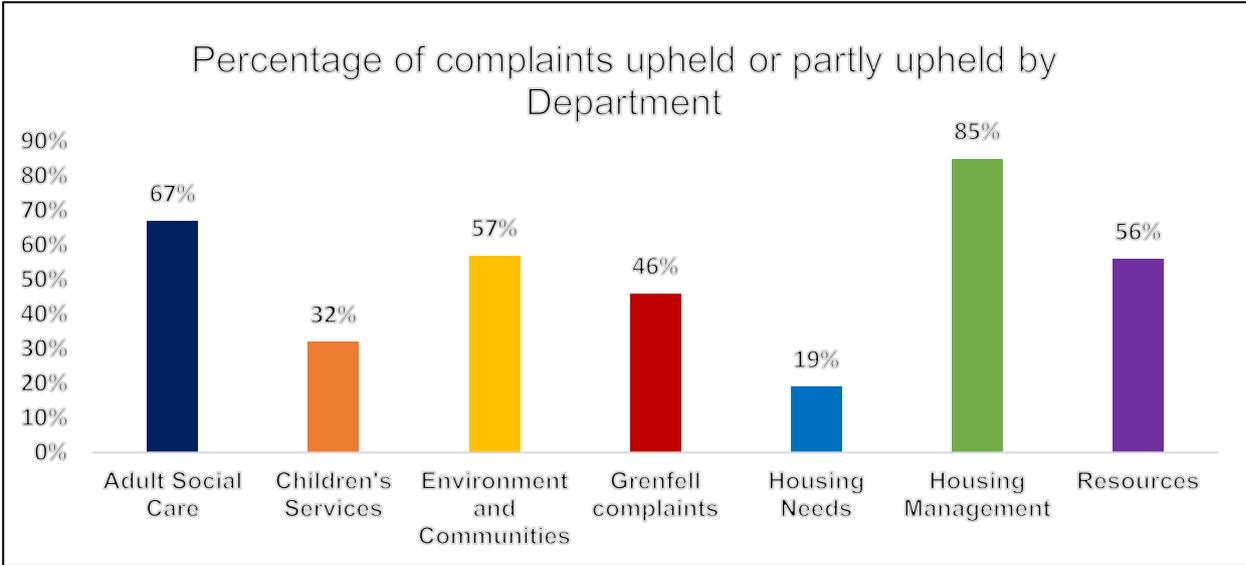
- 3.8 The Council accepted 1,674 complaints in 2021/2022 compared with 1,143 in 2020/2021, which is an increase of 46%. The chart above shows that Housing Management alone have seen an increase of 80%. As explained in the Annual Complaints Report for 2020/21, whilst the Council did see an increase in complaints in 20/21, we believe that this increased would have been larger if it had not been for the Covid-19 Pandemic.
- 3.9 Most departments have seen an increase in the volume of complaints except for Grenfell complaints and Environment and Communities. Given the relatively low volume of Grenfell complaints, the Dedicated Service has taken steps to ensure all bereaved and survivors are aware of the process and to encourage them to make a formal complaint wherever they are dissatisfied with the Dedicated Service or another Grenfell or wider Council service. This includes promoting the complaints process by email and through the monthly Dedicated Service (DS) newsletter, delivering additional briefings for DS Workers, and proactively suggesting the complaints route in discussions with families, with an emphasis on putting things right and learning from complaints.
- 3.10 In Grenfell Housing Allocations, most letters (except for offer letters) now include a standard paragraph about how to make a complaint so that residents are regularly informed about how to do this. In Grenfell Housing Services, information about the complaints process is included in the newsletter, and the Service have phoned all residents to discuss services and support available, including informing residents on how they can contact the Service or make a complaint.
- 3.11 Between April and July 2022, 10 complaints have been received across the three services which shows that promoting the complaints process has had an impact. This also indicates that there will be an increase in the overall volume of complaints recorded in 22/23, which is a positive sign if it means more residents are making use of the process.
- 3.12 During 20/21, Environment and Communities received high volumes of complaints about Noise and Nuisance, changes to parking permit applications and renewals and Planning enforcement issues. However, in 2021/22, where most Services resumed normal working practices following the pandemic and given the easing of government-imposed restrictions, the volume of complaints has decreased.
- 3.13 Housing Management have seen the biggest increase in complaints compared to other Council departments, although this is a wider trend which has been identified in discussions with other London Councils. Analysis undertaken by the Customer Experience Team has also shown that the following issues have contributed to the increase:
- Increase in complaints about repair issues and reports of anti-social behaviour linked to noise nuisance between neighbours which was more prevalent when residents were at home during government-imposed lockdowns and issues were more noticeable
  - The government-imposed lockdowns also resulted in the suspension on non-essential works, but also posed problems with repairs being done in a timely manner due to supply chain issues or staff shortages experienced by contractors
  - Complaints about the Repairs service also identified that many complaints were caused due to a lack of proactive communication at various stages of the process
  - The Department has also seen more complaints being raised due to residents being unhappy with the level of compensation, especially given the increase in the cost of living.

- 3.14 Additionally, some Services have other procedures to investigate issues, including noise and nuisance, planning enforcement issues and missed waste collections. Historically, and to ensure that issues were promptly logged and acknowledged, many of these were accepted at Stage One of the procedure. However, with increased knowledge and better partnership working between the Corporate Complaints Team and Services enquiries are made with the responding Team to ensure complaints are not inappropriately logged as a Stage One complaint if it is the first time the resident has contacted the Council regarding the problem. Services have worked together to facilitate a fair approach which results in a timely response for the customer, whilst also ensuring they are informed about their rights to escalate the matter if the problem is not resolved. This has also contributed to a reduction in the number of complaints accepted within Environment and Communities.
- 3.15 In all other Directorates, overall volumes have increased and the key contributing factors are largely due to the Corporate Complaints Team raising more awareness of the complaints process by explaining the importance of ensuring complaints received directly into services are logged on the corporate system. This was previously being done inconsistently in many areas. During quality assurance activities, some complaints indicated that the customer was dissatisfied, and officers genuinely made multiple attempts to resolve the issues. Since then, more complaints have been raised directly by Services after a couple of attempts to resolve the issue have been unsuccessful.
- 3.16 Also, during most of 20/21, enforcement activity for council tax, business rates and parking was suspended. This resumed in late Autumn 2021 and resulted in a high volume of complaints being received across the Parking Service and Resources Department.

### **Outcome of complaints**

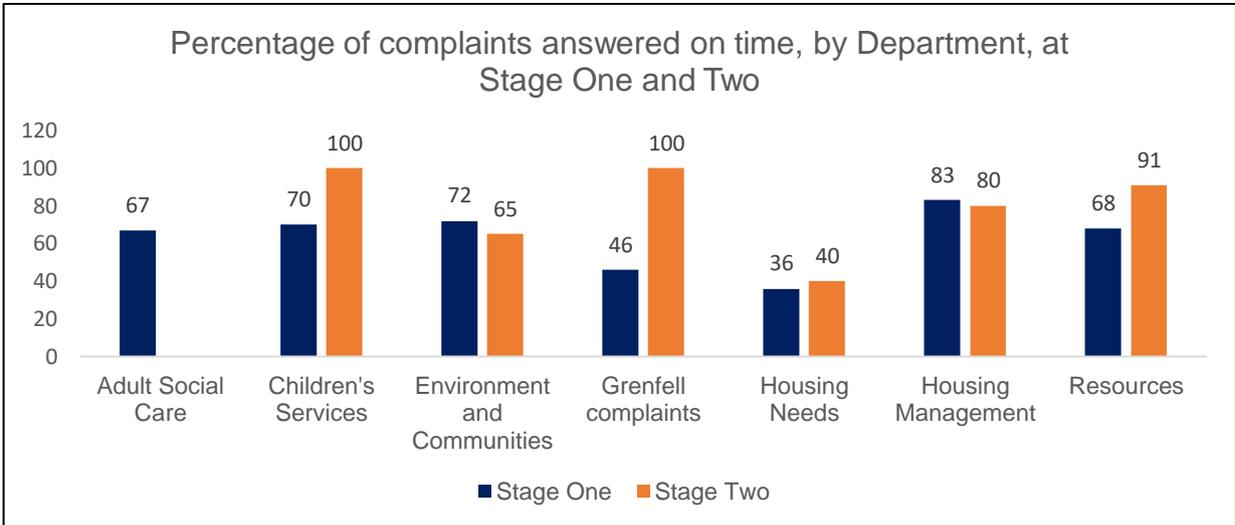
- 3.17 In 2021/2022, 1,583 complaints were responded to and on average 53% were upheld which is consistent with the uphold rate in 20/21, which was 55%. Other London Council have also reported upholding 45-55% of complaints and therefore the organisation should feel reassured that outcomes are comparable to other Local Authorities.
- 3.18 As demonstrated in the chart below, the average uphold rate for Children's Services is lower than the Council average. However, when quality assuring responses the Corporate Complaints Team have not disagreed with the outcome recorded.
- 3.19 Similarly, the uphold rate in Housing Needs is also much lower than the Council average. However, quality assurance activities did identify cases where complaints should have at least been partly upheld. This has been addressed through training and continues to be monitored during weekly meetings with Teams in Housing Needs. There is also additional scrutiny being applied by the Customer Experience Team to ensure that outcomes are recorded correctly. We are seeing a benefit to this work: whilst the uphold rate was 19% overall for 21/22, in Q1 22/23, it was 52%. There are various factors that have caused this such as Investigating Managers having more confidence in identifying complaint points and separating complaints about housing decisions, from complaints about service failures. Complaints about the latter have resulted in more complaints being partially upheld. The Directorate has implemented several measures to improve performance as set out in 3.25 and 3.26.
- 3.20 It is also noteworthy that uphold rates differ considerably between departments as shown in the chart below. The high percentage of complaints upheld in Housing Management is due to a significant volume of complaints being about delays in

completing repairs or completing them right first time, both of which have and continue to be addressed by the contractors commissioned to complete the works.



**Timeliness**

- 3.21 Since 1 April 2021, the Council replaced the three stage complaints procedure with two stages. The target response times also changed from 15 working days at Stage 1, 2 and 3 to 10 working days at Stage 1 and 20 working days at Stage 2.
- 3.22 As the Council adjusted to reduced timescales at Stage One, it expected to see a slight decline in performance due to having one less week to respond. In 2020/2021, 83% of Stage One complaints were answered within 15 working days. Following the move to a two stage complaints process, overall, across the organisation 63% of Stage One complaints were answered within 10 working days.
- 3.23 It is important to note that each Department has seen a regular improvement in timeliness since the implementation of a two-stage process. For example, overall, in Q1 21/22, 61% of complaints were answered on time and on average it took 14 days to respond to any Stage One complaint. However, by Q4, on average 78% of all complaints were answered on time and on average it took 10 working days to respond, which is in line with the target timescales for a response.



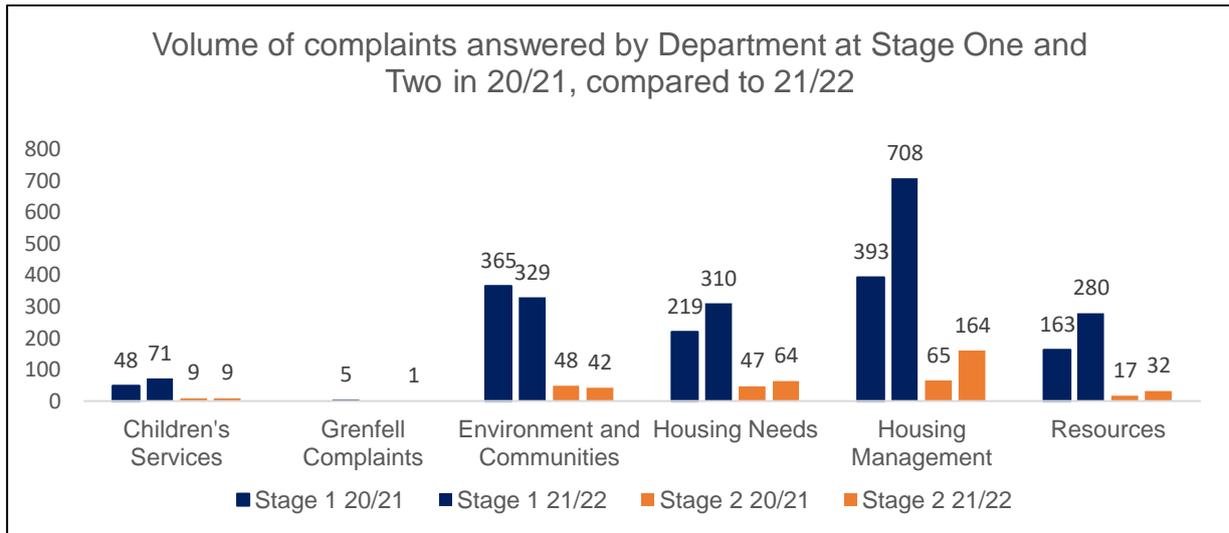
\*It should be noted that the Adult Social Care complaints procedure is a single stage process, and most complaints are investigated in that process. Whilst the statutory procedure has different prescribed timescales, the percentage above reflects the complaints answered within 10 working days.

- 3.24 Whilst most Services responded to approximately 70% of complaints on time at Stage One, the overall performance in Housing Needs is considerably lower, at 36% on time. The Department have seen an increase in the overall volume of complaints, and it is important to note that the implementation of the restructure in 2020/21 resulted in some staff leaving and gaps in resources. Recruitment into the posts were completed over time and all positions were filled by November 2021. This was a significant contributing factor which negatively impacted performance for the first six months of the financial year.
- 3.25 Another factor was that during the height of the pandemic, all Housing support and assistance was being managed by phone or email. This is because the Directorate could not provide a face-to-face service in the Customer Service Centre, therefore opportunities to resolve issues at the first point of contact were limited. This has affected the volume of complaints and overall service delivery. However, since re-opening the Customer Service Centre, there is also a face-to-face presence in Children's Centres and local community groups to provide a more proactive service to resolve housing needs.
- 3.26 Housing Needs has also undergone a transformation in how complaints are managed. Managers and Heads of Service are now responsible for taking ownership of complaints directly within the corporate system, compared with the previous model where the complaints function was more involved in investigating and drafting complaints. This change has naturally affected performance (as officers have been familiarising themselves with using the system and changing operational procedures to manage complaints differently). However, this was a change that was both pending and necessary to enable officers delivering services to better understand the cause of complaints, as well as taking ownership of implementing improvements. The change in approach has also been accompanied by weekly meetings to discuss the merits of all open complaints, and weekly reporting of open and overdue complaints being sent to the Senior Management Team.
- 3.27 The Department has already seen an improvement in timeliness as although the overall average for Stage One complaints answered on time was 36% in 21/22, this has increased to 53% for Q1 22/23.
- 3.28 Only 46% of Grenfell related complaints were answered on time at Stage One. It is necessary to explain that most of these complaints were multi-faceted requiring contributions from Grenfell Housing Allocations and Grenfell Housing Services. However, this should not be a barrier to complaints being responded on time. As such, complaints about Grenfell related complaints will be centrally co-ordinated and more regular reporting of complaints due a response will be provided to Managers and Heads of Service to ensure complaints are answered on time.

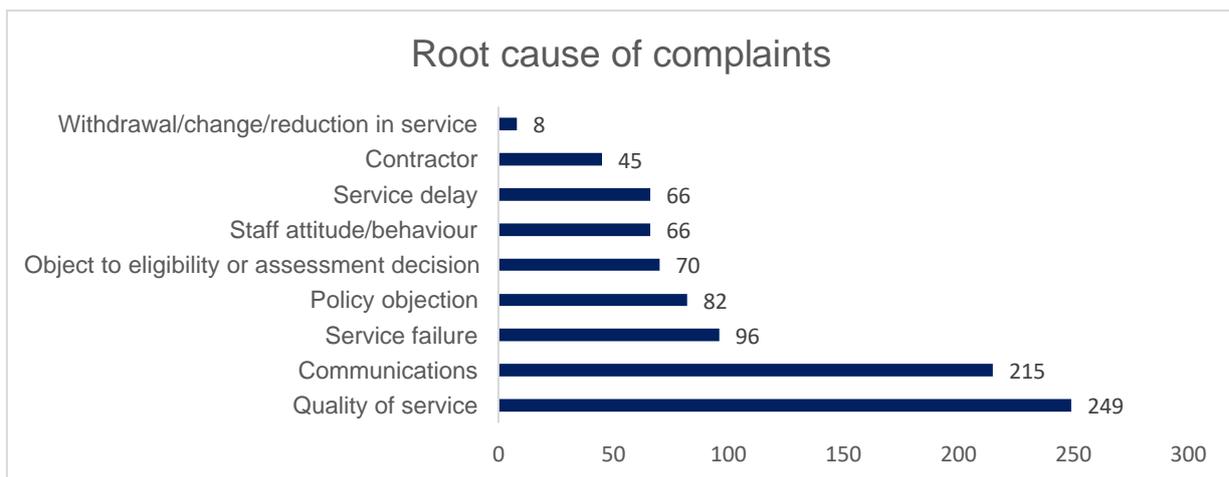
### **Escalation to Stage Two**

- 3.29 In 20/21, 156 complaints were escalated to Stage Two which represents 13% of the total volume of complaints received. In 21/22, 311 complaints were escalated which represents 19% of all complaints received. Whilst more complaints were escalated, the two stage complaints process has made it easier and quicker for residents to escalate their complaint and receive a final response. Therefore, this increase was expected.

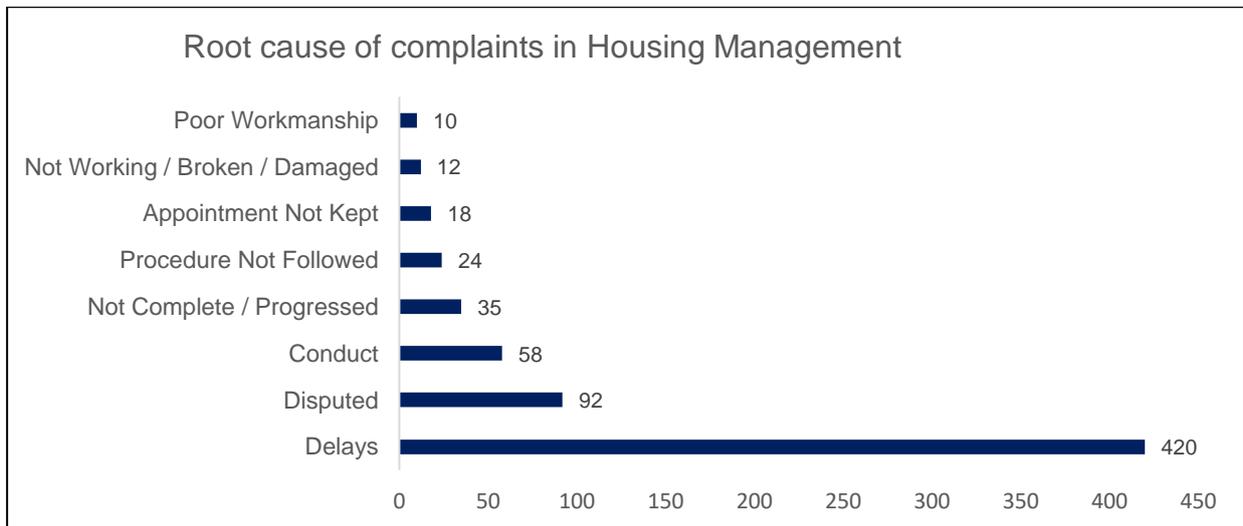
- 3.30 The most common reason recorded for an escalation to Stage Two was because the customer disagreed with the Council’s decision or because the response failed to address all the issues that were raised.
- 3.31 Investigating Officers need to answer complaints properly at the first stage, so that the resident does not have to complain again. For that reason, if the desired outcome cannot be met, Officers must provide a thorough explanation for their decision and set out any other options available if these are available. Whilst the Corporate Complaints Team quality assure a randomised sample of complaints to give feedback and address training needs, Investigating Officers must take ownership of addressing the root cause of the complaint properly in the first instance.



- 3.32 The chart below shows the root causes of the complaints received where the problem was categorised in the corporate system (this therefore excludes complaints about Housing Management).



- 3.33 When looking at complaints about Housing Management, there are various root causes, so the chart below shows the volume of complaints recorded with more than 10 cases being about the same issue. As demonstrated by the numbers, 420 complaints were recorded as being about delays. When analysing this further, these related to customers complaining that repair works were not completed in a timely manner. It is important to acknowledge that root causes (for both the corporate system and Housing Management IT system) reflect what the customer has complained about. However, this does not mean that the Council was always at fault as some complaints will not have been upheld.



3.34 Analysis of complaints about “quality of service” showed that complainants were unhappy about a lack of co-ordinated response to their initial concerns i.e., a lack of ownership. They also expressed dissatisfaction about the poor quality of information they received and complex processes, which were not aligned to what they would reasonably expect.

3.35 When looking more closely at complaints about communication, there were a variety of issues, the majority indicated that:

- Residents’ expectations were not managed in relation to the frequency of communication; especially when an issue could not be resolved at the point of contact
- Information sharing between services was poor for example, information wasn’t passed onto the relevant Team to take action
- Lack of communication around the reason for the decision
- Information recorded was inaccurate and this resulted in processing error

3.36 This analysis of complaints enables the organisation to focus on what matters to residents. Many of the themes are being addressed in the Council’s Customer Access Strategy and significant progress has been made to co-design service standards with residents with the aim of improving the customer journey and reducing complaints. However, Council Officers must also focus on improving the customer experience by keeping residents updated regularly, sharing information promptly between Council Services so that residents do not have to tell us more than once, and to provide better reasoning for their decision making.

#### **4 Complaints process - update**

4.1 This section of the report focuses on events that have impacted complaints handling and changes that have been introduced during 21/22.

4.2 In line with existing arrangements, Housing Management continue to use their well-developed CRM casework system to record and manage cases and complaints in parallel with the Corporate iCasework system. An integration of these two systems is still being developed and several meetings have taken place with the supplier to better understand requirements. Fortnightly meetings have been diarised to review processes so that operational procedures can be adapted to address technical enhancements.

Whilst there is still some duplication of effort in the management of complaints about Housing Management, it is hoped that a solution will be agreed and implemented by Autumn 2022.

- 4.3 Since 1 April 2021, the Council has also moved to a two-stage complaints procedure which reduces the overall length of time it takes to receive a response. The timescale has been shifted to 10 working days at Stage one, and 20 working days at Stage Two. This has resulted in a shorter process overall and a quicker resolution for residents.
- 4.4 Most complaints about Adult Social Care and a significant proportion of complaints about Children's Services fall within the remit of the statutory complaints processes, and these were therefore not affected by the changes to the Council's corporate complaints procedure.
- 4.5 In Autumn 2021, the Corporate Complaints Team was audited. The focus of this audit was to review: policies, procedures, recording complaints, quality assurance activities, responding to and recompense to complaints.
- 4.6 In February 2022, a draft report was produced and the overall conclusion by Internal Audit is that **Satisfactory Assurance** can be given to Members, the Chief Executive, and other officers that the controls relied upon at the time of the audit were suitably designed, consistently applied and effective in their application.
- 4.7 The findings resulted in further recommendations which could be put in place to develop an even more robust approach to complaints management. As a result, three recommendations were made to, and accepted by, the Executive Management Team on 13 July 2022.
- 1) The Corporate Complaints Team will work more closely with DMTs to ensure there's routine analysis of complaints and that learnings are being applied and improvements made. This will be supported by Complaints Officers providing more regular reporting on learning opportunities following lessons learnt becoming a mandatory field for upheld complaints as set out in 6.2.
  - 2) To note and support a review of the Stage One and Two complaints process which is intended to address some of the findings identified in the audit.
  - 3) To continue to drive a culture of learning and professional curiosity to better understand insights from complaints and compliments.
- 4.8 The Audit found that the procedure to respond to Stage One and Two complaints was not always followed; specifically, that responses were not always signed off by the responsible Officer. Similarly, the Corporate Complaints Team were not always provided with the draft Stage Two reply to quality assure.
- 4.9 These observations have raised a broader question about whether the procedure has been designed to meet the needs of complainants. As such, the Corporate Complaints Team have contacted customers to better understand what matters to them when they complain. The purpose of having customer led insight was to ensure that internal processes are aligned to customers' expectations. These were that:
- Complaints should be answered quickly
  - The organisation should acknowledge the problem and aim to resolve it
  - The organisation should provide clear explanations if the problem cannot be resolved in the way that the complainant expects and offer other options where available

4.10 The feedback has given the organisation an opportunity to review the complaints procedure; especially the process for signing off complaints to see if more flexibility can be introduced, whilst also ensuring appropriate controls are in place to ensure high quality responses. The Corporate Complaints Team will continue to report on their quality assurance findings to DMTs so that Directors can address quality issues. The Team will also be carrying out randomised checks on open complaint investigations to assess if the Investigating Officer is really taking the customer's voice into account when answering the complaint.

## 5 Quality assurance

5.1 The Corporate Complaints Team has continued to carry out quality assurance activities on complaints received. 20% of complaints closed each month are reviewed. The Complaints Team look at the five main principles of effective complaint handling as set out in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Guide to Effective Complaint handling. These key areas are:

- 1) Identifying and accepting the complaint
- 2) Defining the complaint
- 3) Investigation
- 4) Making and communicating the decision
- 5) Putting things right

5.2 The findings of the quality assurance activities have shown that the organisation:

- Has improved the quality of responses by extracting key complaint points and addressing complaints more thoroughly
- Is mostly using Council templates to ensure that formatting, structure, and key explanatory information regarding referral rights is provided in the response
- Refers to the evidence that has been used to investigate issues and make conclusions
- Is generally more willing to accept when things have gone wrong, or service delivery has fallen short of the expectation

5.3 On the other hand, it is unsurprising that the quality assurance activity has also identified the following improvements that Investigating Officers need to address to develop an even more mature approach. They also align with what customers reasonably expect the organisation to do when a complaint is made:

- Acknowledge the impact of a problem on the resident and genuinely demonstrate empathy for any inconvenience caused.
- Avoid explaining lengthy processes which may come across as officious and defensive and use language which would mirror the conversation if the complaint had been resolved on the phone or in person.
- Accept where things have gone wrong, summarise what the faults are, but focus the reply on how the feedback will be used to re-design processes or introduce new procedures to improve the customer journey.

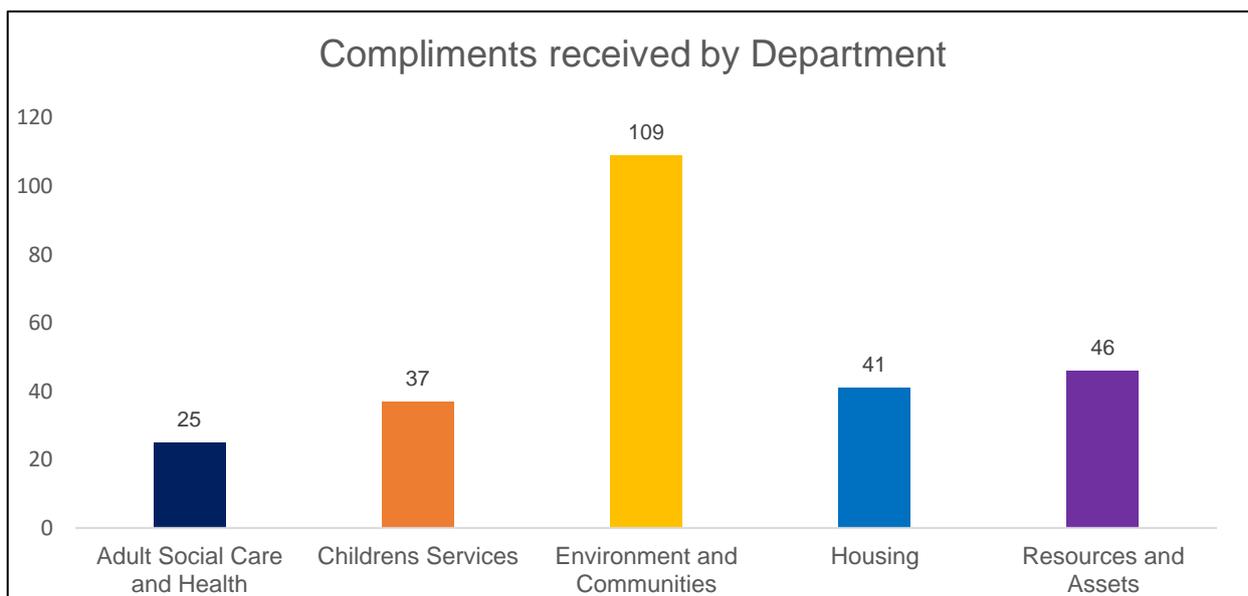
5.4 It is hoped that reviewing the complaints procedure and re-designing some elements of how complaints are managed, that the Corporate Complaints Team may be more involved in working collaboratively with Investigating Managers to achieve these improvements.

## 6 What have we learnt and how have we improved?

- 6.1 Whilst it is important that the Council has robust procedures to ensure complaints are centrally managed and responded to, it is even more important that the organisation prioritises learning from complaints by making improvements and embedding changes.
- 6.2 Over the last 12 months, the Corporate Complaints Team have introduced changes to enable the organisation to become more confident in investigating, responding to and learning from complaints, notably the Team has:
- Delivered complaints workshops and training to several Services across the Council. These consisted of a 3-hour workshop covering all aspects of complaint handling, with a greater focus on good quality investigations and writing more balanced and empathetic responses
  - Created a new category in the IT system, to more easily identify complaints that span across more than one Service area; enabling Services to look more holistically at the issues affecting some customer journeys
  - Worked with the system supplier to enhance the lessons learnt feature which now requires Officers to record remedial actions/lessons learnt when they have upheld or partly upheld a complaint. Training has been provided to ensure that commitments are tracked and assigned to an owner.
  - Designed a complaints leaflet in partnership with the Communications Service to ensure that information about how to complain is available in Council offices, libraries, and community centres. The aim of this was to ensure the complaints service is accessible to those who are less digitally confident.

## 7 Compliments

- 7.1 The Council has recorded 258 compliments about staff and services, compared with 45 in 20/21. The Corporate Complaints Team have reminded staff of the importance of recording compliments to celebrate good practice and ensure that Officers and Services overall continue to deliver services in the way that the community appreciates.
- 7.2 The breakdown of compliments by Department can be seen in the chart below and the key behaviours that residents have expressed gratitude for are for staff being:
- Quick, responsive, and helpful
  - Human, compassionate and non-judgemental
  - Taking ownership of an issue and keeping residents updated on progress
  - Taking the time to explain processes and decisions



## 8 Update on priorities set for 21/22

8.1 In the last 12 months, the Council has focused on improving how quickly it responds to complaints and developing a culture of learning and improvement in response to feedback.

### Casework

8.2 Investigating Managers need to prioritise improving response times, however the Corporate Complaints Team have done the following to try and support Officers to do this:

- Weekly reporting of complaints due a response are sent to the Investigating Manager and Head of Service. Similar reports highlighting overdue complaints are also sent so that the Manager and Head of Service can respond to the customer promptly.
- Automated reporting of open cases is also sent to each Department to allow them to take ownership of monitoring complaints. For Adult Social Care, Children’s Services, and the Housing Department where there is a central complaints function, these are sent to the central mailbox daily as these inboxes are always monitored.
- The Corporate Complaints Team are also reviewing how multi-service complaints are managed as these are often delayed past the 10-working day target response time. Complaints that span over multiple services should not be a barrier to responding on time and the Corporate Complaints Team will be carrying out case conferences more regularly to ensure Officers take ownership of responding to the complaint.

### Third party complaint handling

8.3 A clause has been added to all new contracts to ensure that routine recording and response to complaints is undertaken by the contractor, which should be monitored by the Contract Manager.

- 8.4 The Corporate Complaints Manager has worked with colleagues in Legal and Contracts and Procurement to develop a survey to understand the arrangements that are in place to manage and respond to complaints about third parties.
- 8.5 Following analysis of the responses, recommendations will be made to the organisation to ensure the approach is consistent and effectively managed.

#### Improving customer experience for customers who make a complaint

- 8.6 The organisation has confidently embedded the two-stage complaints process, with a focus on responding to complaints as quickly as possible.
- 8.7 The introduction of a new Complaints and Compensation policy has enabled the organisation to be consistent in its approach to managing complaints. The policy has also helped to distinguish service requests/enquiries from complaints and this transparency has supported residents and internal colleagues so that queries are not incorrectly recategorised.
- 8.8 The Corporate Complaints Team continue to quality assure 20% of Stage One complaints issued and the findings are shared with the relevant Managers each month, rather than confining this to the quarterly reporting structure. This was introduced to enable Services to apply the feedback more promptly.
- 8.9 The Complaints Network is a group of Officers representing each Council department, who have been nominated to drive improvement in complaint handling practice. The Network has been meeting monthly to discuss complex cases, highlight emerging issues and trends and to share best practice. In the last 12 months the Network has:
- Reviewed compensation guidance
  - Developed the Corporate Complaints and Compensation policy
  - Carried out analysis of the root cause of complaints
  - Conducted a self-assessment against the complaints maturity model to identify actions to improve complaint handling practice
  - Assessed third party complaint handling practice and developed the survey for contract managers
  - Discussed future system enhancements to support better complaint handling practice
  - Developed training and workshop material for complaints handling

## **9 Priorities for 22/23**

- 9.1 The organisation strives to deliver a mature, effective and efficient approach to complaints management, which serves to use positive and constructive feedback to improve service delivery for customers. In 2022/23, the organisation needs to:
- 1) Review the complaint handling procedures; specifically, how complaints are managed, investigated, and signed off so that the process is aligned with what matters to customers.
  - 2) Answer 90% of all complaints within 10 working days at Stage One and 20 working days at Stage Two.

- 3) Wherever possible, answer the complaint right, first time so that residents are not having to complain twice to get the issues resolved. This means Officers must answer the totality of the complaint with compassion and where the desired outcomes cannot be met, provide a through explanation about why.
- 4) Ensure a centralised view of complaints, including those about Housing Management, so that the customer journey is consistent across all Departments.
- 5) Complete the recommendations and actions set out in the Audit Report.

## **10 Complaints 20/21**

[Appendix A](#) – shares findings of the Local Government and Social Care and Housing Ombudsman services.

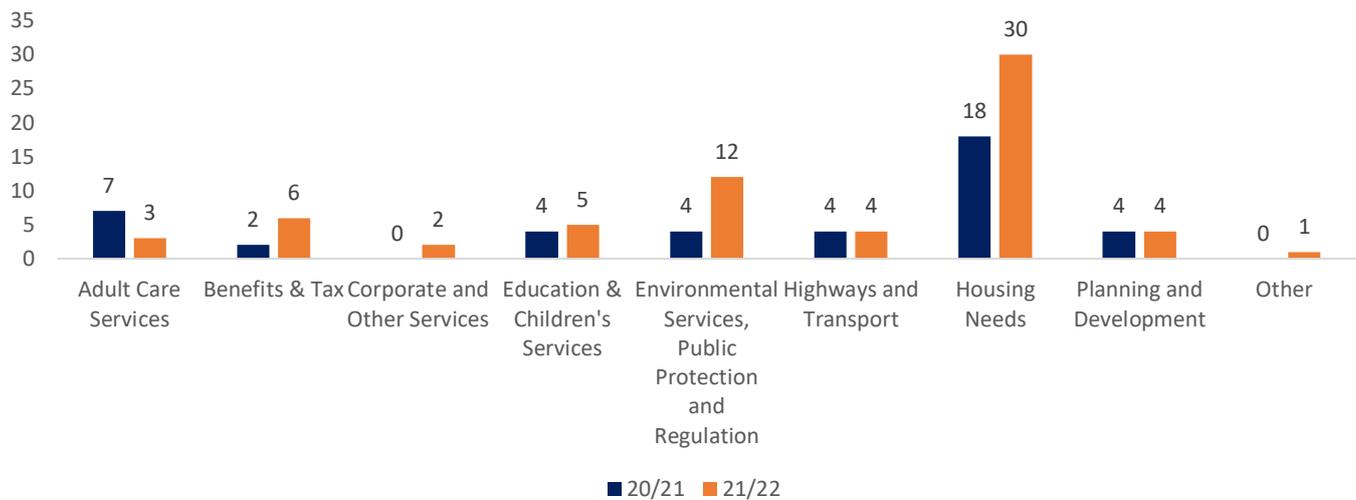
[Appendix B](#) – Local Government and Social Care’s Annual Review Letter 2022

[Appendix C](#) – reports on departmental performance, learning opportunities and service improvements

### **Appendix A – Complaints to the Ombudsman**

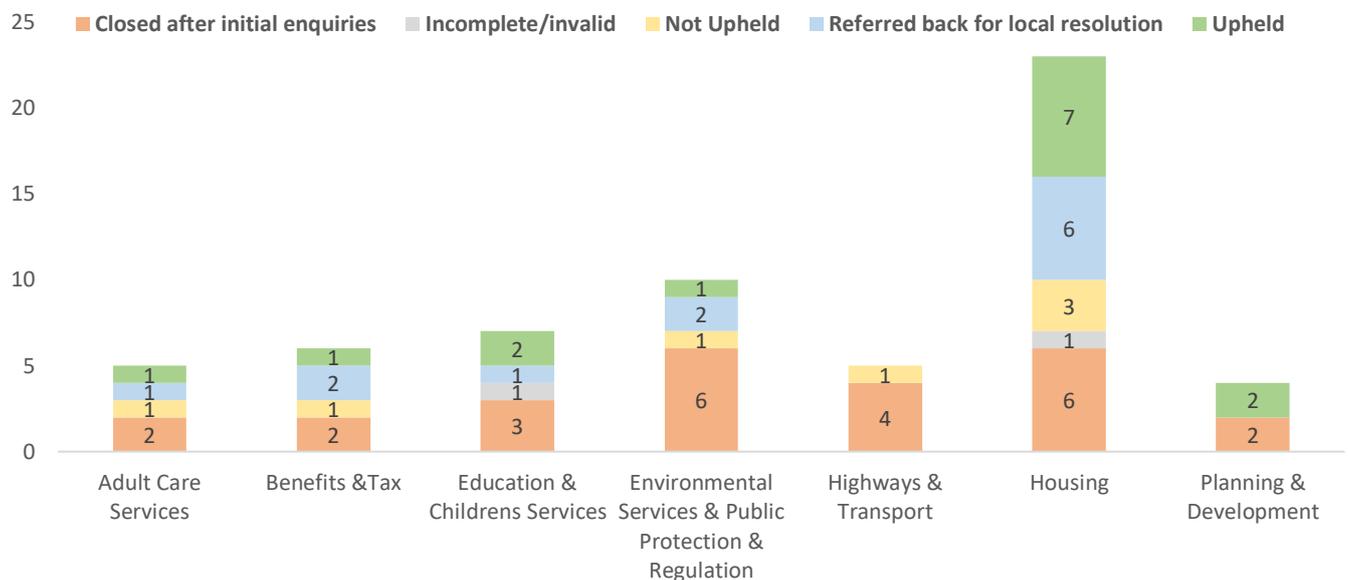
- 1.1 The section focuses on analysis of cases received and decided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The data is published in the Ombudsman’s annual report ([Appendix B](#)) to councils and is publicly available on their website. The end of this section provides some information on complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman Services.
- 1.2 The chart below shows the volume of cases received by the LGSCO in relation to each Service, although it should be noted that the volumes and decisions are not reflective of the Council’s own records. This is because the LGSCO may receive enquiries which it does not later go on to investigate fully. In most areas, volumes are low, except for Housing. It should be noted that this relates to Housing Needs and not Housing Management (which is arbitrated by the Housing Ombudsman service).
- 1.3 The LGSCO received 67 complaints in 21/22, compared to 42 in 20/21. The increase in complaints should not be a cause for concern, as the volume of enquiries in 20/21 was impacted by the LGSCO suspending casework for three months during the height of the pandemic. Complaint volumes overall were therefore lower.

### Volume of complaints received by the LGSCO in 21/22 compared to 20/21



1.4 The LGSCO also reached a decision on 65 complaints although it should be noted that this will not be in relation to the same complaints referred to above as it may have received an enquiry before 1 April 2021 but made the final decision during 21/22.

### Ombudsman Outcome by Decision in each Department



1.5 Of the complaints that were accepted for investigation 14 out of 21 were upheld (67%). This is lower than the 78% of complaints upheld in 20/21 and shows a promising downward trend of complaint outcomes being overturned by the Ombudsman. It is also lower than the percentage of complaints upheld in similar authorities, which was 71%.

1.6 Contrastingly, only one complaint was fully answered within the Council's complaints procedure and so the Ombudsman did not reach a different outcome. This single complaint represents 7% of the total complaints investigated. This is lower than the average for similar authorities, where 11% of complaints were remedied during the

Council's complaints process. This means Council Officers need to be better at identifying what has gone wrong, the impact to the customer and how it can be put right.

Department	Number upheld
Adult Social Care	1
Benefits & Tax	1*
Education and Children's Services	2
Environment and Communities	3
Housing Needs	7

1.7 Recommendations from complaints upheld by the Ombudsman identified the following opportunities to improve practice. The Council accept all recommendations and the Ombudsman is 100% satisfied that remedies have been completed are in progress.

### 1.8 Adult Social Care

Three complaints were considered by the LGSCO. One was not fully investigated another was not upheld. The third complaint was initially received in March 2021, but the outcome was shared in October 2021. This complaint was partly upheld, however, the Ombudsman concluded that the Council had acknowledged its oversight and put appropriate measures in place to improve the service going forward. These actions were.

- 1) A new "Early Financial Conversation" section has been added into the care needs assessment form for all clients who need a chargeable service. The care manager completes this section with the client/representative to discuss the finances. This is followed up by the Financial Assessment Team to reiterate and obtain all necessary financial information to confirm charges for services as soon as possible.
- 2) Upon review of the case notes, it transpired that more information about the extent of the discussions could have been recorded on the case notes. Processes were reviewed for ensuring financial discussions are clearly recorded on the system in the hospital teams, including embedding a similar mandatory field into the assessment used by the hospital staff (Discharge to Assess assessment).
- 3) The Team has also revised and circulated a form that practitioners will seek to have signed by residents and/or their representatives to demonstrate that the financial assessment form has been given and the Charging Policy has been discussed. Social workers will then retain a copy of this for Social Care records.

### Benefits & Tax

1.9 One complaint about an overpayment in Housing Benefit was remedied within the complaints procedure as the Council decided not to recover the payment. The Ombudsman was satisfied that even if they investigated the complaint, there would be no injustice to the resident and their investigations would not reach a more beneficial outcome. The resident also had a right to appeal to the Tribunal and therefore some aspects of the complaint may have been out of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

### Education and Children's Services

1.10 Five new complaints were escalated to the Ombudsman in 21/22. Two were closed as they were out of the Ombudsman's remit. Two investigations are pending. Two complaints were upheld, one of which was a complex complaint about Fostering which was originally received by the Ombudsman in 20/21, but the decision was only issued in August 2021, so the recommendations are shared here:

### 1.11 **Case 1**

The Ombudsman recommended the Council pay £500 to a foster carer for the time and trouble she experienced in pursuing her complaint about the fees she was paid after the introduction of the Tri-Borough fostering arrangements in 2012. The Ombudsman also asked the Council to:

- 1) Revise its policy for handling complaints from foster carers. It should ensure it is clear from the outset of a complaint which process it intends to follow and why. It should ensure that it adheres to the relevant guidance and policy on complaints handling. It should consider providing training to its complaints team to achieve this aim.
- 2) Inform any other foster carers who were kept on pre-existing foster care agreements prior to the joining of the councils of our final decision on this complaint. If the Council considers it should re-visit the payments they received until their payment structure was brought in line with the Standards, it should do so. If it does not consider this is necessary it should explain why, giving any carers affected the option to approach the Ombudsman if they choose.

### 1.12 **Case 2**

The Ombudsman recommended the Council pay a parent £500 for the time and trouble she experienced in pursuing her complaint, specifically, the delays she experienced in having her complaints escalated to Stage 2 of the Children's statutory complaints procedure. As part of the decision, the Council was asked to arrange for the complaint to be investigated at Stage 2.

All recommendations were accepted, and most of the remedies are complete. Some outstanding actions in relation to the complaint by a foster carer are pending due to the complexity of the case.

## **Environment and Communities**

- 1.13 The Ombudsman investigated five complaints and upheld three cases. One related to the Community Safety Team for failing to follow the community trigger process. The Ombudsman acknowledged that the remedy put forward by the Council during the complaints process was sufficient. The remaining two complaints resulted in the following recommendations, all of which have been complied with.

### Planning

The Council failed to keep a resident updated regarding its third planning enforcement investigation and asked that the Service write a letter of apology to the resident for the impact this caused.

In a second case, the Ombudsman asked the Council to write to the resident to apologise for not addressing her specific concerns about the intrusion from light fixtures and inconsistency of approach with a specific application; as well as to provide an appropriate response to those issues within 4 weeks of the decision.

Two further improvements have been identified in response to these complaints, as set out on p. 22, points 14) and 15).

## Housing Needs

- 1.14 Thirteen complaints were considered by the Ombudsman but four were closed at initial enquiry stage. Three complaints were not upheld as no fault was found. However, the remaining six complaints were upheld, and the findings and recommendations for each Service area are set out below.
- 1.15 It should be noted that the general shortage of suitable properties is a pan London challenge. This means that the Council is at risk of receiving similar upheld decisions as are other London Councils.
- 1) The Council should apologise for failing to provide suitable temporary accommodation and pay £7,000 (£250 a month for the 28 months she has lived in accommodation the Council deems unsuitable; and continue to pay this until she is in suitable accommodation), and a further £250 in recognition of the time and trouble she has been put to in trying to resolve this matter.
  - 2) The Council failed to assess the affordability of accommodation it helped a resident to secure following acceptance of a duty to relieve her homelessness. Consequently, she suffered injustice because the Council wrongly ceased its duty and she resided in accommodation which was unsuitable on affordability grounds. The Council should review the case and pay £150 for each month during which Ms Y was in unaffordable accommodation and remind its officers of the requirement to assess affordability.
  - 3) The Council agreed to apologise to Miss D for the time she spent in unsuitable accommodation, and pay £1,100 in recognition for the time, trouble and distress this caused.
  - 4) The Council was asked to apologise in writing and pay Ms D £100 to acknowledge the distress, time and trouble she experienced because of the Council's failure to ensure her viewing of the property could go ahead as agreed.
  - 5) The Council should pay £300 as a remedy to acknowledge the delays in completing the repairs at the property, the distress inconvenience and financial loss these disrepairs caused, and £100 for the time and trouble the resident took to pursue her complaint.
  - 6) Pay Ms X £200 to recognise the distress caused in the error with her housing application which meant she may have lost opportunities to bid on properties. She experienced time and trouble in resolving the matter. The Council should also write to Ms X to confirm she is still on the direct offers list
  - 7) The Council should, if still appropriate, review whether there is an exceptional need for Ms Y's daughter to remain housed with Ms Y and provide Ms Y with a decision on this and within three months of the decision, the Council has also agreed to review its system that automatically makes the decision to remove a member of a household from an application once they turn 21-years old. This review should make sure a decision letter is sent to affected applicants explaining the reasons for the decision. This letter should include the Council's assessment of whether such family members have "an exceptional need to live as part of the household" and inform the individual if an exceptional need does not exist.

## **Learning and improvement**

- 1.16 The Housing Needs Service acknowledges that there have been challenges with external managing agents' ability to resolve cases of disrepair which has led to complaints. Regular contract monitoring meetings are in place to monitor this. The Council website has also been updated and direct contact details are available for residents to notify the Council if the managing agent is not fulfilling their duties.
- 1.17 There have also been some compensation payments related to delays in responding to housing needs complaints, and this is being addressed by weekly meetings and increased reporting to avoid responses being sent out late.
- 1.18 The IT system used to record housing needs casework has since been updated so that when an individual turns 21, they are not automatically removed from the household.

## **The Housing Ombudsman Service**

- 1.19 The Housing Ombudsman contacted the Council about 28 complaints during 21/22. During this period it has reached a decision on 12 complaints. It should be noted that there are 25 complaints pending an outcome as the average investigation time for the Housing Ombudsman Service is approximately 12 months. Of the 12 complaints that were considered, two complaints have been upheld. The following remedies were recommended:
  - 1) The Repairs Team were recommended to pay a total of £400 compensation. This included the £200 originally offered within the complaints investigations, and a further £200 as the Ombudsman found that even after the faults were identified, the resident experienced a further 12 months of delays in having repair works completed.
  - 2) In another case, the Ombudsman found that although the Council had offered £125 in compensation for the loss of fridge items following a leak, it did not properly and quickly signpost the resident to make an insurance claim for the other damages he had reported.
- 1.20 In total, the Council has paid £13,365 in compensation to remedy faults that have been identified during Ombudsman investigations. This is less than the £23,643.00 paid during 20/21.

## **Appendix C – Departmental Performance**

### **1. Adult Social Care**

1.1 The Adult Social Care statutory complaints procedure is a one stage process. The Department of Health's regulations on statutory complaints stipulate that the timeframe for responding must be proportionate to the seriousness of the complaint and completed within 6 months.

1.2 However, Kensington and Chelsea Council use a 10-working day timescale. Naturally, some delays are unavoidable due to the complexity of cases. 130 complaints were recorded in 21/22 compared to 91 in 20/21. 67% of these were answered within 10 working days compared to 52% in the previous year. In total, 92% of complaints were answered within the extended 20 working days target timescale, which is also an improvement from 85% in 21/22.

1.3 Adult Social Care Teams upheld or partly upheld 65% of complaints which is like the 67% upheld in 21/22. Below are some of the learning opportunities and improvements that have been identified:

- Care workers must have a clear care plan to ensure they know the care tasks they need to complete when carrying out a home visit.
- One Homecare agency made changes to their rostering system to ensure care calls are prompt and take place at agreed times
- The teams have been reminded that all complaints, especially those made verbally, must be logged with the Customer Engagement Team to ensure due processes are followed and complaints are not left to escalate as a result.
- Working with homecare providers to ensure all complaints handled under their own CQC complaint processes are also reported to the ASC Customer Engagement Team. This is to make sure a satisfactory resolution is achieved and in line with the LGSCO's directive that the Council is aware of what has been actioned in relation to their service users.
- Given the increase in complaints in the homecare service provision the team are focusing on this with partner agencies and commissioning colleagues to support the care providers in delivering good quality care in the home. Especially, preventing recurrence of issues and following up on the remedial actions promised as we have seen repetitive issues from the same service users.
- The Complaints lead has advised Heads of Service to ensure for complex multi-disciplinary complaints a meeting must take place early on to ensure a good investigation plan is implemented.
- Following a complaint about wrongful homecare charges the Head of Service has been advised to ensure the responsible team liaises fully with the charging/finance team to avoid further invoicing complaints
- Making sure that all inter service and inter departmental complaints for ASC are dealt with in co-operation from all colleagues, and that clear outcomes and decisions are made to resolve the complaint fully.
- Communication with service users and their relatives is key – one complaint identified that this fell short of good standard and as such the relevant service area has been reminded to make sure staff understand the importance of this and consistently follow good communication guidance.
- The Customer Feedback and Engagement Team also record remedies and learning directly onto the system to make information more accessible and easier to follow up.

More information about Adult Social Care complaints can be found in the Statutory complaints report. Please contact [hsscusercontent@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:hsscusercontent@rbkc.gov.uk) for a copy of the report.

## **2. Children's Services**

2.1 Children's Services recorded 65 complaints in 21/22 compared with 53 the previous year, whilst this is a small increase, volumes overall remain low compared to other Departments. This includes complaints under the statutory Children's Complaints procedures which operates different timescales. The following performance information relates solely to complaints answered within the Council's complaints procedures.

2.2 Children's Services responded to 70% of Stage One complaints within the 10 working days, compared to 80% in 20/21. This decline in performance was perhaps expected due to the complexity of some children's complaints, and the shorter turnaround time introduced in the new two-stage complaints procedure. Promisingly, 100% of Stage Two complaints were answered on time.

2.3 27% of all complaints were upheld, which is consistent with 30% the previous year. The following actions and or improvements were made in relation to complaints received:

- The Ladbroke North Team underwent a refresher training session on Data Protection and Cyber Security.
- The Fostering and Adoption Service now manage complaints through the Council's complaints process, but further scrutiny has been applied to these complaints to ensure that where necessary, complaints are considered under the statutory Children's Complaints procedure. Regular meetings now take place between the Customer Relationship Team and Bi-Borough Fostering and Adoptions Service.
- Regular meetings will also be taking place with Foster Carers until December to raise awareness and provide information about the complaints process. This is following a complaint from an existing foster carer which highlighted that information about the complaints process was not always shared.
- Some Managers and Heads of Service across Bi-Borough Family Services attended Complaint Handling Training provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to build more confidence and strengthen investigation skills
- Where further information is required from a complainant, the Service will write and give a timeframe in which the response is expected rather than leave it open ended. Information about what the Council will do if a response isn't received will also be made clear.
- After several complaints relating to children who were looked after in care dating back to the 1970s, further investigation of the LGO's approach to such complaints has highlighted that these complaints will not be investigated by them. Therefore, to avoid any disappointment, complainants are now informed that their concerns won't be progressed through the complaints procedure, but professionals will still review files and send an explanatory letter.
- Staff were reminded to follow due process in amending the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) following a review meeting. The EHCP should include the proposed changes required for a child with special educational needs.
- 3 specific remedies were recorded to ensure follow up information was provided to a complainant, or that records were amended after information was received from a parent/carer.
- Social workers were reminded to share assessment reports with parents in good time before a conference and give the parents enough time to add their comments to the report before the final report is signed off.

### **3. Environment and Communities**

3.1 Environment and Communities include many customer-facing services such as Parking, Cleaner and Greener Services, Environmental Health, Communities and Libraries and Registrars.

3.2 The Department received 263 complaints in 21/22 compared to 372 in 20/21. As previously reported, the Department received a much bigger volume of complaints about Parking and noise and nuisance at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Following new parking procedures being introduced, some stability has been achieved, and similarly, as lockdown restrictions were lifted, fewer complaints about noise and nuisance were received.

3.3 The department has answered 72% of all complaints on time at Stage One compared with 79% in 20/21. This was an expected impact of shorter turnaround times to reply at Stage One, but the Department is confident that performance will improve. Increased reporting and a monthly summary of performance has also been positively received to enable the Department to adjust practice to ensure continuous improvement.

3.4 57% of complaints have been upheld or partly upheld, and the following improvements have been introduced to improve service delivery:

- A reminder to the Noise and Nuisance Team to ensure confidentiality when sharing information.
- The Noise and Nuisance Team have had a briefing to discuss the importance of informing residents about an Officer's visit before attending the property.
- Training was arranged for staff to address knowledge gaps and avoid repeat complaints in note taking to increase quality of written records.
- Review the information provided for remote registration ceremonies and ensure that those who already have an invite are contacted regarding any updated information
- To add a description of experimental traffic order process within letter drops to residents.
- A parking review began on 18 January 2022. Recommendations that are put forward are likely to take 3-6 months to be implemented and it is hoped that process improvements which will reduce complaint volumes.
- The complaints process for plot holders has been refreshed.
- Reviewing contract arrangements with partner organisations and contractors regarding Markets, Suez for waste collection and Out of Hours.
- Weekly inspections to ensure a specific market stall is maintained within its boundary and kept tidy; and a review of staffing arrangements to carry out inspections at appropriate intervals at more isolated sites.
- Feedback was given to the Manager at SUEZ to ensure that their staff follow the right procedure in terms of reporting incidents promptly to the Council.
- Improved communication to residents making planning applications; specifically, to discuss technical information and probable outcomes via a telephone conversation.
- Carry out routine reporting of planning cases to ensure that all casework is allocated.
- Training to Building Control Officers on how to give professional advice.
- Training has been delivered to Officers to remind them of the requirements set out in the Local Enforcement Plan (LEP), which also sets out how the Service will communicate with complainants.
- Acknowledgement letters to complainants will also be reviewed to see if more information can be added to explain how complainants will be kept updated.

#### **4. Grenfell Related Complaints**

- 4.1 5 complaints were made about the Dedicated Service and 3 of these were answered within 10 working days. The remaining two complaints took 14 working days to answer and required contributions from other Teams and were therefore more complex. The complaints covered a range of areas such as personal budgets, commissioned services and access to support and services.
- 4.2 There were 2 complaints about Grenfell Housing Allocations which took 20 and 55 working days to answer. The residents were kept updated throughout the investigation. Whilst the low volume of complaints may be surprising, the Service prioritise building relationships with residents that focus on trust and transparency at all stages, therefore any dissatisfaction is addressed early and quickly.
- 4.4 8 complaints were received about Grenfell Housing Services and 3 were answered within 10 working days. 4 complaints were answered within the extended 20 working days (as permitted by the Complaint Handling Code). The remaining complaint took over 30 working days to answer.
- 4.5 In the cases where responses took more than 20 working days, these all required contributions from multiple Officers. As Services are being delivered by three different Directorates, there was sometimes a lack of ownership in identifying one Officer who would be responsible for ensuring the complaint was investigated and responded to quickly. To ensure more timely responses, a commitment has been made to review processes and complaints will be co-ordinated by the Housing Customer Experience Team or the Corporate Complaints Team depending on the nature of the complaint.

#### **Learning and Service improvement**

##### Dedicated Service

- The Dedicated Service has identified a need to strengthen the wording in the commissioning policy around the use of individual service budgets.
- The Dedicated Service will need to ensure adequate cover is available when a Dedicated Service Worker is on leave so that access to support and services is not delayed.
- Mechanisms to ensure more frequent communication between the Dedicated Service, Grenfell Allocations and Grenfell Housing Services have been put in place to support better cross-service working.
- A monthly newsletter has been introduced to ensure residents supported by the Dedicated Service are aware of the breadth of services and have access to timely updates about service provision.

##### Grenfell Housing Allocations and Grenfell Housing Services (GHA and GHS)

- Grenfell Housing Allocations routinely including information about how to complain in most letters, however, they will be introducing this within email responses as this is the primary method of contact.
- GHS has identified the need for more proactive communication with households and for quicker responses in cases of service failure.
- Promoting the Grenfell Housing Service Standard through the newsletter to enhance understanding amongst households, contractors and key stakeholders
- Review the complaints process and provide information about the procedure with households via the newsletter
- Monitor the frequency and quality of communications

- Make better use of technology to manage service delivery and communication, and reduce residents effort in accessing and using our services

## **5. Housing Needs**

- 5.1 The Housing Needs Directorate has many responsibilities, such as assessing homelessness applications, supporting residents in temporary accommodation, monitoring contracts where residents are living in properties managed by private landlords as well as reviewing housing allocations and managing the bidding process to support residents to move to settled accommodation.
- 5.2 258 were received in 21/22 compared with 222 in the previous year. The increase in volumes is consistent with other Council departments. 36% of complaints were answered within 10 working days at Stage One, compared with 40% in the previous year. As explained in section 3.17 and 3.18, the Division adjusted to the conclusion of a large-scale restructure in early 2021 and this had a significant impact on service delivery as many positions were left vacant until recruitment was completed in late 2021.
- 5.3 Services have continued to improve timeliness in issuing responses over the course of 21/22 and this remains an area of focus with weekly meetings taking place to monitor and address complaints performance. The Senior Management Team are confident that introducing a new approach to complaints management, along with structure and stability in Management positions will result in an improvement in performance during 22/23.
- 5.4 The uphold rate has historically been lower than other Council services, however, quality assurance activities undertaken by the Corporate Complaints Team identified that in some instances, outcomes were incorrectly recorded as they did not separate housing decisions from service failures. This has been addressed through further training. In 21/22, 19% of all complaints were upheld, compared with 23% in the previous year. The following measures have been introduced to improve complaint handling and the customer journey:
- All Teams in Housing Needs attended complaint handling training workshops, which covered the following areas:
    - Contacting the complainant by phone on the day the complaint is received and immediately starting the draft response, referring to the conversation
    - Making commitments where a full resolution hasn't been achieved by the target response date, and ensuring these are clearly referenced in the response with a specific date for resolution (to be tracked and reviewed by the Customer Experience Team)
    - Putting things right and understanding how to decide what remedies are appropriate in relation to different types of fault
    - Improving responses to the resident (tone, content, language, empathy and being transparent about learning opportunities)
  - More complaints have been followed up by further meetings or phone calls.
  - Dedicated work is being undertaken with the Citizens Advice Bureau, Children's Centres, the Curve and Shelter which focuses on community centred work. It is hoped that this will reduce the volume of complaints as more issues could be resolved on the spot, without the resident needing to make complaints for action to be taken.
  - Services have also worked with hospitals and there is now a direct point of contact for queries, concerns and complaints which should result in better partnership working with health agencies to achieve timely resolution to issues.

- Regular contract monitoring meetings are taking place with managing agents to ensure reports of disrepair are promptly followed up and agreed works are completed in a timely manner.

## 6. *Housing Management*

- 6.1 Housing Management have maintained the way in which complaints are recording on their service-specific IT system (Microsoft Dynamics) rather than the corporate iCasework IT system. The Department has seen an 80% increase in the volume of complaints received. Despite this increase 93% of Stage One complaints were answered within 10 working days and 86% of Stage Two complaints were answered within 20 working days.
- 6.2 On average, the Department upholds 85% of complaints which is much higher than the average across the Council. However, Housing Management is also pro-active in identifying and implementing lessons from complaints, with a 6 monthly review process in place, led by their Customer Experience Manager.
- 6.3 Housing Management report the following learning opportunities and service improvements that have been identified in response to complaints:
- More consistent and proactive communication with residents, both prior to a general enquiry or repair becoming a complaint, and after a Stage One response has been issued.
  - Improving the way Stage One commitments are tracked, so that it is equally as effective as the controls in place following a Stage Two response.
  - Following a criticism from the Housing Ombudsman regarding the use of Stage One follow ups (something which is not explicitly stated within the current or Corporate Complaints policy) a review of the Complaints policy is being undertaken.
  - Given the 9% increase in inflation across the UK, and the 54% rise in the energy price cap in April 2022 and further planned rise by an additional 51% (to £2,980) in October 2022, there may be an opportunity to review the Compensation and Redress policy to address the impact that this will have on residents experiencing a loss of utilities.
  - Embedding an approach which ensures that Officers take accountability for tasks and there are systems in place to avoid cases being overlooked when staff are on leave or unexpectedly absent.
  - More robust contract monitoring, and management is needed to address the volume of complaints about contractors and issues with performance and complaint volumes should be a consideration when contracts are due for renewal.
- 6.4 In terms of the implementation of lessons previously identified, Housing Management have provided the 5 examples below:

Lesson: analyse and assess what parts are routinely required by analysing repairs and boiler types, and ensure sufficient stock is in place.

### Implementation:

- Van Stock reviewed by contractor at regular intervals
- On the commercial contract - critical spares were purchased for RBKC and held in store.
- On the domestic contract this is ongoing by the contractor. Also included in the new domestic gas contract for the contractor to be manufacturers' representative of the commonest boilers on RBKC's contract - especially for boilers under warranty.

Lesson: Ensure a formal process is in place with full comms and responsibility for updates, and trigger for next point of update, on any gas / heating / hot water issue.

### Implementation:

- Technical Services Manager arranged with K&T (Domestic and Commercial) to put a formal process in place, which went into effect from April 2022 onwards.

Lesson: Assess the potential of sourcing additional noise recording equipment and the robustness / instructions for use of recording equipment

### Implementation:

- Our Anti-Social Behaviour Manager reviewed the waiting list for North and South Neighbourhoods, and it is a longer waiting list in the South than North. As such, it was suggested that the South could use the North's when needed.
- However, following further discussions it was agreed that a 3<sup>rd</sup> set of equipment would be obtained that can be used as a floater between offices, and act as a contingency when one piece is being serviced or repaired.

Lesson: Ensure Housing Response staff are clear on responsibility for gas leaks (which side of the boiler) and the process for reporting through to Cadent where appropriate

### Implementation:

- A new emergency gas leak procedure was written and each new starter is taken through processes and informed about this as part of the standard induction process. Gas Safety Training is also carried out.

Lesson: Ensure appropriate communication on the lettings standard are in place, and confirm works outside this in writing, specifically those that have not been completed at the point of letting.

### Implementation

- Leaflet about Voids Standard revised and rolled out in 2021 advising residents and users on the lettings standard currently in place. Expectations laid out in welcome pack and on RBKC website.
- Viewings: scope of work being taken at the point of viewing by the officer to explain to the resident what works will take place prior to letting, this is to manage customer expectations and keep residents involved and informed throughout the lettings process.
- Training was rolled out to officers and in March 2021 an email was sent to team leaders to ask to remind their staff to take scope of works with them during viewings.

## **7. Resources**

- 7.1 The key services receiving complaints in this area are the Contact Centre (this includes the Customer Services Centre), Council Tax and Recovery and Enforcement, and the Revenues and Benefits Teams which also include Discretionary Awards and the Accessible Transport Team.
- 7.2 236 complaints were recorded in 21/22 compared with 163 in 20/21. This increase was expected as some services were suspended during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, such as enforcement action for non-payment of council tax and business rates, and these activities then resumed in 21/22. There have also been several complaints about businesses who have applied for business grants and been unsuccessful; or those who have been impacted by longer response times due to the high volume of applications.
- 7.3 68% of Stage One complaints were answered on time, compared with 76% in 20/21. As explained earlier in this report, all Services have had to adjust to shorter timescales at Stage One. The Department has also been impacted by a restructure affecting many Services. This resulted in some gaps in resources and one Managerial position is still vacant. The Department has already seen a remarkable improvement in performance for Q1 22/23, with 90% of complaints being answered within 10 working days at Stage One. 56% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld and some of the improvements that have been made are:

### **Parking**

- An improvement was made to the Parking permit renewal confirmation email, providing residents with details of their permit number and permit expiry date.
- To improve the parking application process and reduce the number of rejected applications because of incorrect documents supplied. The Contact Centre team are updating the Parking website to include example images of the documentation required to successfully process an application.
- To ensure Parking refunds are processed within a timely manner, contact centre managers are copied into any approvals sent by the Parking Fraud Team.
- The Parking Fraud Team now contact residents prior to cancelling their permit, explaining why their permit has been cancelled and providing their contact details should the resident wish to challenge their decision.
- Changes have been made to the online parking application form to make it easier for resident to apply or renew their permit. However, given the high volume of complaints about parking applications and renewals, a Parking review is in progress to look at the end-to-end procedure.
- There is a Parking review underway which is likely to improve the customer journey and should reduce complaint volumes.

### **Contact Centre**

- The Contact Centre Team have re-reviewed the hiring process when recruiting temporary advisors to ensure quality customer service is maintained when handling calls.
- Training on demonstrating empathy during call handling to better acknowledge and respond to the impact of issues being experienced by residents.
- To improve efficiency when logging issues reported via phone, Contact Centre staff will be trained to develop questioning skills so that the information they gather is informative and promptly recorded to reduce call handling times.
- Team Leaders have been asked to monitor wallboards more diligently and for advisors to wait before transferring a call and if there is a queue, they must inform residents/customers that there is a queue and ask if they are happy to be transferred.
- Soft skills training has been scheduled for the Out of Hours Team.

## **Council Tax and Recovery**

- A Council Tax review was completed during which has identified several improvement opportunities and recommendations were implemented in Spring 2022.
- The Council Tax Team have improved the information in 1st reminder letter to make them more informative, clear and customer friendly.
- Advisors are encouraged to take more time to explain technical council tax related queries to help customers and avoid repeat complaints.
- In Recovery and Enforcement cases where liable parties need to be traced, their details are being checked beforehand. This ensures the correct parties are contacted as part of enforcement action.