



# Cambridge City Council

## Annual Complaints and Feedback Report 2019 - 20

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## Cambridge City Council's Annual Complaints Report - Introduction

Every year Cambridge City Council publishes an Annual Complaints Report, which gives an overview of the complaints the Council has received and how we have dealt with them, though we do not publish names or other personal details of people who have complained.

Cambridge City Council welcomes customer feedback, to help us to identify and address problems for customers, and to improve our services. This report shows how we have increased customer feedback about services and how we are responding to complaints.

### Why we produce this report

- To learn from our mistakes so that we can improve our services.
- To encourage people who have cause to complain to make comments and suggestions to help us make these improvements.
- To show how we've responded to complaints and what we've done to try to put things right.
- To publicise and explain our complaints process.

### Our Complaints Procedure

#### What is a complaint?

A complaint can be wide ranging, but can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with the service provided, or lack of action by the Council, or its staff. This can include failure to achieve specific standards of service.

It should be highlighted that issues brought to the Council for the first time, are dealt with as a request for service and so are not processed as a formal complaint. However service requests can then escalate into a stage 1 complaint if the customer is further unsatisfied. This may occur from delays in response or dissatisfaction with staff behaviour or policies.

Customers complain to the Council if they:

- Are unhappy about something we have or haven't done.
- Are not satisfied with the way a member of staff has treated them.
- Are not happy with the way a councillor has treated them.

During 2019/20, Cambridge City Council had a three stage complaints process:

**Stage One:** An issue raised by a complainant which is escalated beyond a service request for the first time.

**Stage Two:** Internal review of a complaint where the complainant is unsatisfied with the response to their complaint or the way in which the complaint has been handled, and they wish for their complaint to be considered further.

**Stage Three:** Review by an Independent Complaints Investigator, where the complainant remains unsatisfied with the internal process and wish to take their complaint further.

The **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)** is the final stage - the person affected must have gone through our complaints process before going to the LGO for an independent review.

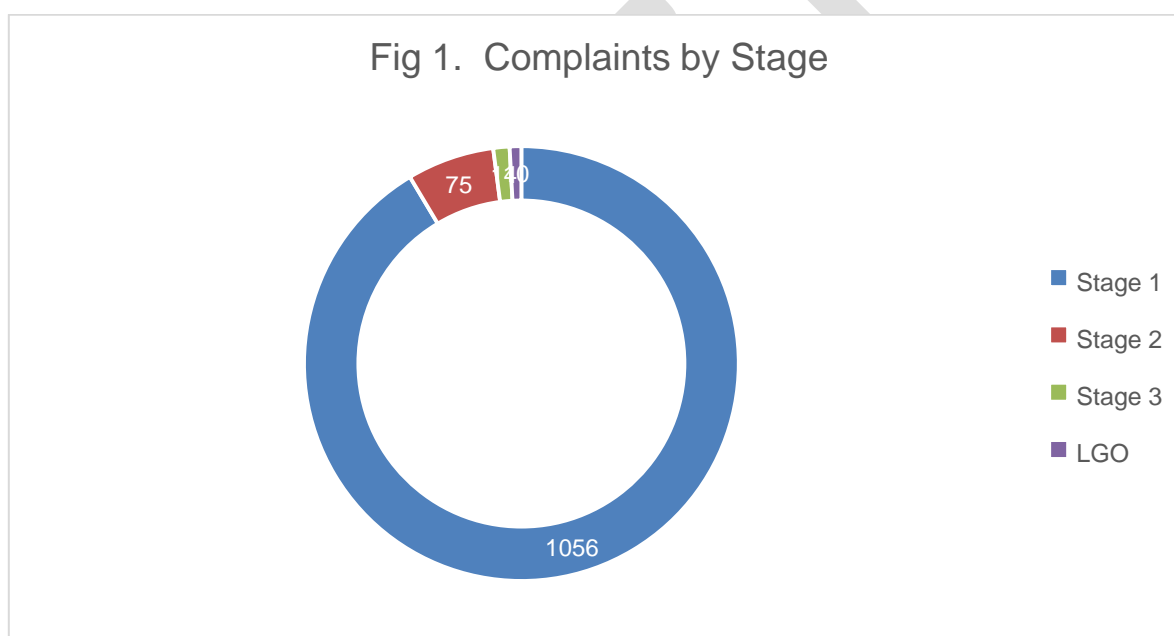
## Complaints to Cambridge City Council in 2019-20: summary

In 2019-20, the total number of complaints dropped slightly compared to the previous year, by 16 down from 1161 to 1145.

Of those 1056 complaints, 92% were resolved successfully at the first stage without need for escalation. This compares with 89% in 2018-19, and 91% in 2017-18.

75 complaints were escalated to stage two, and a further 14 were escalated to the Independent Complaints Investigator. See Fig 1 below.

Across all complaints submitted, 81% were resolved within the target time of ten working days. This represents an improvement on previous years, where 76% were responded to within time in 2018-19, and 68% in 2017-18.



### Breakdown of complaints by service

398 (35%) of all complaints received by the Council were for Waste Services. This represented a decrease of 149 from the 526 complaints (45% of the total) received in 2018-19. 45% of these complaints related to missed bin collections, compared to 69% in the previous year.

The number of complaints increased compared to the previous year for Estates and Facilities, Community Services and the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service.

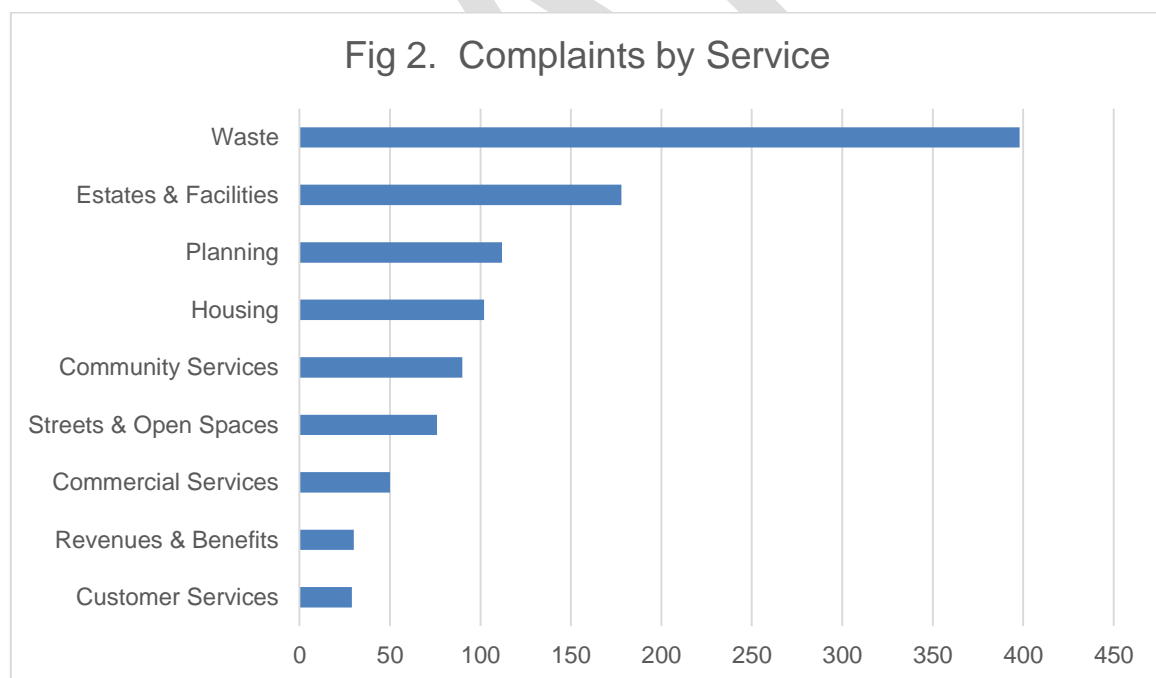
The rise in complaints to Community Services was related to Cambridge Live coming back into the City Council under Community Services' remit. This brought not only the sheer volume of business and customer interactions that Cambridge Live generates into the Council's responsibility, but also the challenge of integrating complaints management in that operation back into City Council systems, policy and procedure.

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS) has seen a number of changes in recent years with its transition to a shared service with a new management structure and new systems, policies and procedures. For instance, it was identified during training with the team that complaints were not always being recorded formally and were sometimes being resolved informally by planning officers – they are now being more consistently recorded and managed.

Moreover, the GCSPS had significant staffing challenges in the year, with the consequence of some planning applications being handled less promptly, and/or by less experienced or temporary staff, sometimes not to customers' satisfaction.

With this now being addressed (following recent successful recruitment campaigns bringing in more (and more experienced) permanent staff, the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service is expecting to see a reduction in the number of complaints it receives, and an improvement in the way that they are handled, during the 2020/21 year.

A comparable process has been seen in Estates and Facilities, whereby complaints are being recorded more consistently in the complaints system now following a managerial review which has also sought to address the performance (primarily timeliness) issues which had been generating complaints.



## **Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)**

14 new complaints were submitted to the ICI in 2019-20. Of these complaints, 9 were investigated and of these 2 were partially upheld. (See page 32 for more detail).

Following research conducted by the Council's Strategy & Partnerships Manager, and presentation to Civic Affairs Committee in October 2019, it was agreed to remove stage three from the City Council's complaints policy. This change brings the Council further in line with colleagues in neighbouring and comparable authorities who also generally have two stage complaints processes.

## **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)**

13 complaints were made to the Local Government Ombudsman. Of these, four were investigated and, of those, two were upheld. (See pages 34-35 of this report for more detail).

## **Reporting, monitoring and driving service improvement**

The City Council's managers work hard to understand the reasons for the complaints, and where a consistent theme or issue has been established, have taken action to prevent the poor service that triggered those complaints from being repeated. We continue to work hard to deliver high quality services to all residents and customers and welcome all feedback on our services and suggestions for improvement.

The Lead Complaints Officer reviews data on a monthly and quarterly basis to establish themes and trends. This data is reported on a quarterly basis to Directors and Heads of Service to prompt reflection on what services needs to do to improve, change or prevent a reoccurrence. Particular attention is focused on responding appropriately to complaints first time and reducing complaints being escalated to the higher stages. The reason for escalation has sometimes in the past been due to the complaint involving more than one council service at stage one.

## **Customer contacts with the City Council - overview & context**

During 2019/20 over 210,000 telephone and electronic contacts were received and over 56,000 face to face visits recorded at the Customer Service Centre. Around 149,000 contacts were handled by the Councils Interactive Voice Response system. Of these, over 37,000 contacts had their enquiry resolved by the system. The number of complaints is relatively low in relation to the overall volume of customer contacts received by Council services.

In 2019-20 the Council received 164 compliments via Complaints Tracker. We also received 7993 positive comments through GovMetric, our customer satisfaction rating system. This amounts to around 59% of the total 13,593 instances of feedback received by the Council through that system.

## Review of process and improvement activity in 2019/20

To become more robust within our own process, and ensure escalations were minimised by resolving more cases at the first stage, the Customer Services Business and Development team refreshed officers' knowledge within all service areas on how to use the Complaints Tracker system; and arranged training from the Local Government Ombudsman's office for the managers who deal with most complaints. This training focussed on how to investigate and respond to a case thoroughly. Two sessions were held early in 2020, with 15 attendees on each course.

### How complaints were received

Year	Email & Web	Telephone	Face to Face	Letter
2019-20	89%	8%	2%	1%
2018-19	80%	14%	4%	2%
2017-18	86%	6%	4%	2%

The majority of complaints were received in writing, predominantly via customers submitting their complaints themselves. 73% of complaints were logged by members of the public using the web form to report directly into the Council's Complaints Tracker, which is an increase on 62% from last year. Work to integrate the complaints system with the online customer portal is. The intention of this is to see a further increase in the proportion of complaints submitted online.

### Compliments

In 2019-20 the Council received 164 compliments across all services via Complaints Tracker a slight increase compared to previous years.

As with previous years, Customer Services and Streets & Open Spaces received the highest number of compliments, with the majority relating to helpful staff members.

Officers were encouraged during training late in the year to formally record compliments more regularly going forward, as managers had mentioned more than once that the number of compliments formally recorded was lower than expected.

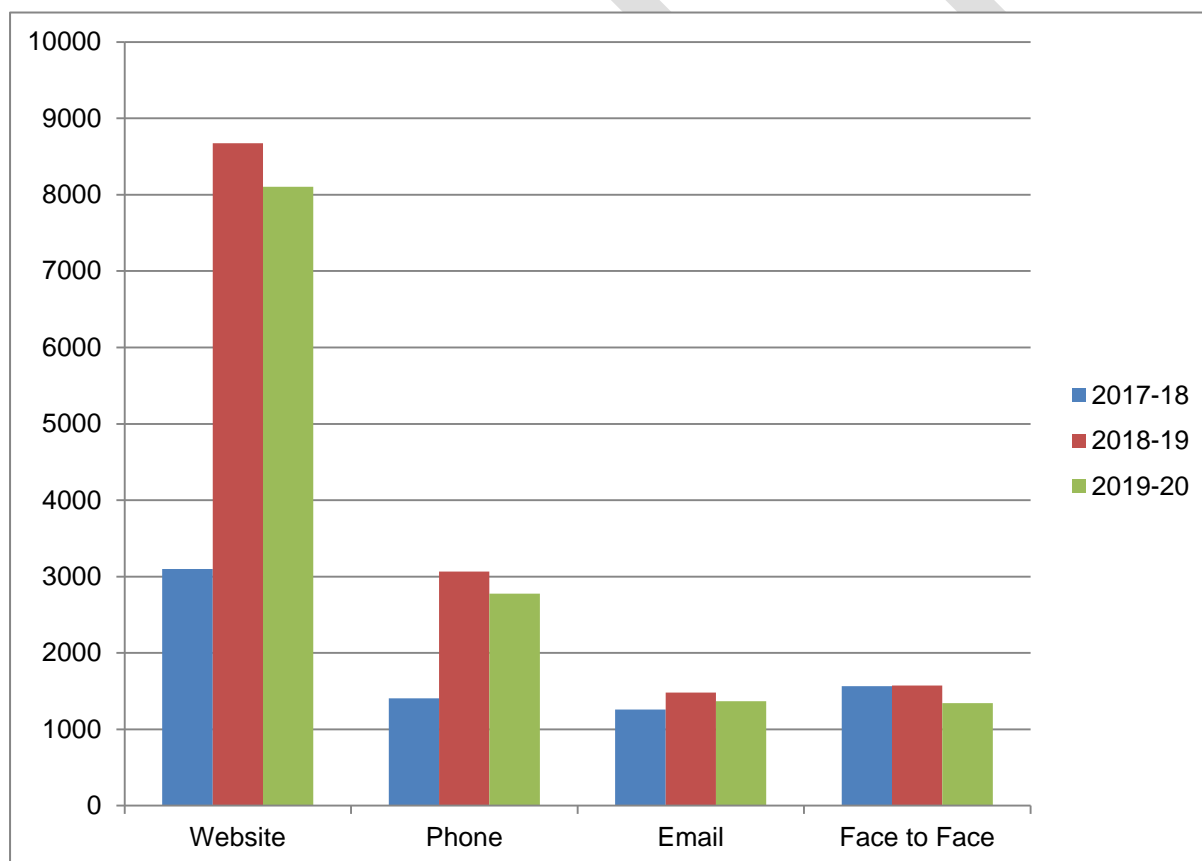
## GovMetric - Customer Feedback System

GovMetric was introduced by Customer Services some years ago to monitor feedback and measure improvement. The tool allows us to record how the feedback was received, ratings of good, average or poor can be selected by customers. They are also able to select service areas/departments and give more specific detail about their experiences.

We currently use GovMetric to monitor feedback from face to face visits to the Customer Service Centre at Mandela House reception and via e-mails and incoming calls to the Customer Service Centre.

### Total Feedback via GovMetric 2017-2020

The below graph shows the total amount of feedback received by channel in comparison to the previous two years. The table on the next page gives percentages of good, neutral and negative feedback.





## GovMetric feedback ratings by channel, 2017 – 2020

Channel	Date	Total	Good %	Average %	Poor %
Phone	2019-20	2775	89%	9%	2%
	2018-19	3067	88%	9%	3%
	2017-18	1405	82%	12%	6%
Face to Face	2019-20	1345	77%	10%	13%
	2018-19	1572	81%	8%	11%
	2017-18	1567	76%	10%	14%
Email	2019-20	1369	61%	16%	22%
	2018-19	1482	49%	21%	30%
	2017-18	1259	57%	16%	27%

### GovMetric Feedback received at the Customer Service Centre

The number of customers providing feedback by telephone in 2019-2020 were at a similar level with the previous year. 89% of customers giving feedback by phone rated the service they received as Good and only 2% of customers gave a Poor rating demonstrating that customers continue to appreciate the service they are receiving from Cambridge City Council.

Customer Services continue to monitor the specific comments given by customers when they submit their feedback. Automatic reports have been set up to highlight the positive comments received from customers, these go to individual advisors showing the number of positive feedback results they have achieved, and these are well received by the team.

The feedback we receive from face to face enquiries also shows that customers value our service, with 77% of customers rating the service as good. This is a slight decrease from 2018-2019 and reflects the change in customer base. We have seen an increase in housing related face to face queries which are complex, requiring escalations to service areas for resolution.

Feedback on email communications has improved markedly in 2019-2020 with 61% of customers rating their response as Good compared with 49% in 2018-19.

### GovMetric Feedback received via the council's website

Channel	Date	Total	Good %	Average %	Poor %
Web	2019-20	8104	45%	13%	42%
	2018-19	8674	35%	14%	51%
	2017-18	3099	38%	15%	47%

The webteam check Govmetric comments, and where possible make amendments to the website to improve it. From recent feedback, the team have made content improvements to make information easier to understand, and checked 3<sup>rd</sup> party systems for errors. The team also fixes any broken links identified if we have not already picked them up.

Positive feedback has increased and negative feedback decreased, some of which will hopefully be a result of the web team's work to improve the website, for example the bin calendar. As customers can also use the GovMetric web function to leave feedback on services, this suggests overall customer satisfaction has improved.

A significant amount of Govmetric feedback at the end of the year was regarding changes to council services due to the coronavirus, for example a number of customers wanting to express concern about the green bin rounds being suspended. As with previous years, negative feedback often is service related, rather than relating to the website itself. For example this may be customers notifying the council of missed bins, or asking why they can't talk to someone at the weekend.

## **Service-by-Service Complaint Trends and Management Response**

Each council department reviews the complaints and compliments it receives on a quarterly basis. This enables services to identify if there are any trends in the types of complaint being made or the services that complaints are being made about. As a result, changes are made to services and how they are provided.

The next section of this report details comments from Services on actions they have taken to prevent, improve or change as a result of the feedback received in 2019-20. The total figure in the first column is the sum of Stage 1, 2 and ICI complaints.

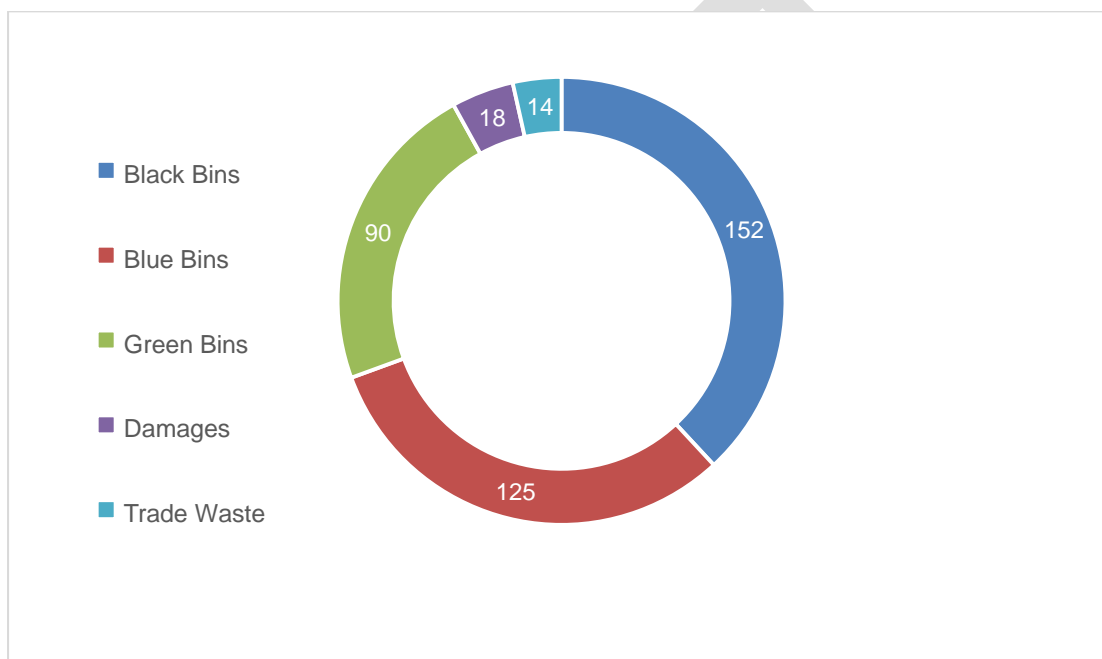
Complaints by sub-service are identified in the pie chart, this is how a service is broken down into the individual service request areas within. The bar graph displays resolution themes, or where these themes are too diffused and a trend cannot be identified, the bars will display root causes.

A resolution theme is the service specific content of the complaint (missed bin for example), whereas a root cause is a reason for the complaint which is generic across all services (service delivery failure).

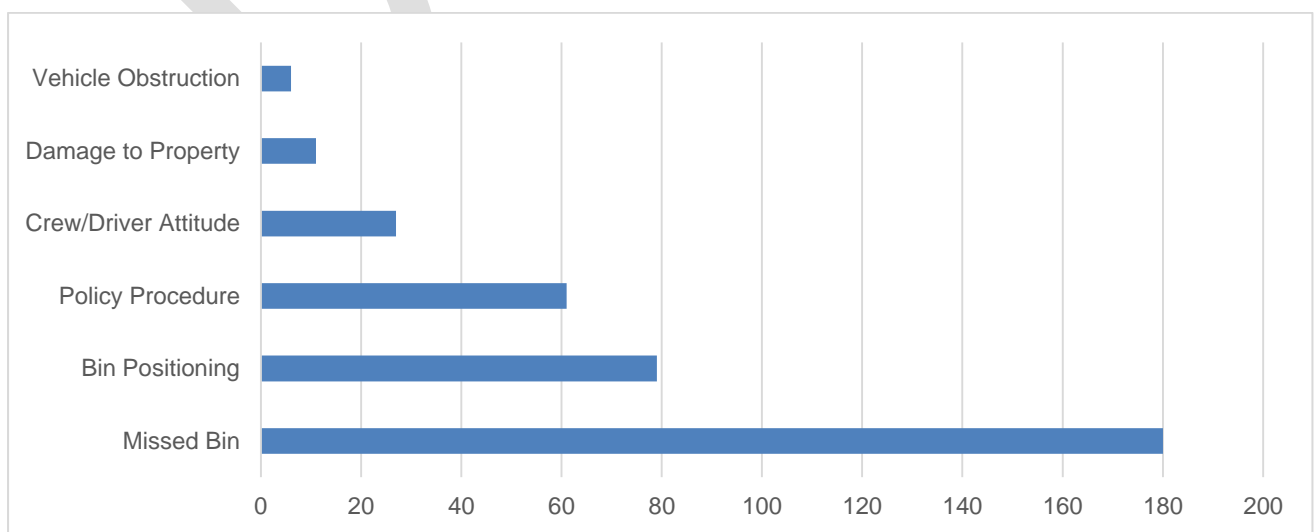
## Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service

Waste	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2019-20	398	16	-	82%	9	13
2018-19	526	31	1	69%	14	3
2017-18	254	11	-	51%	7	3

### Greater Cambridge Shared Waste: Cases by sub-service



### Greater Cambridge Shared Waste: Resolution Theme



# Greater Cambridge Shared Waste - Service Comments

***From Trevor Nicoll, Head of Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service:***

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The Shared Waste Service undertakes in the region 675,000 collections per month, collecting 3 bins per household per fortnight, or approximately 316,300 bin collections per month within the City. The service has increased the number of successful collections to over 99.82%.

In 2019-20, the service recorded 6,999 bins that were not collected on schedule for various reasons – two thirds of these are outside the control of the service such as blocked roads, vehicle breakdowns, or issues where the bin has not been put out for collection. However, these are normally collected within 24 hours. This number of missed bins was up from 6,234 recorded in 2018-19, and this increase was mainly down to a couple of days during last year's summer heatwave.

Of the 6,999, 2,653 were reported to the Council and dealt with appropriately as "service requests".

The total number of recorded complaints for the service (including complaints relating to bin collections) fell from 526 in 2018-19 to 398 in 2019-20.

The service has work hard to reduce the number of complaints and the speed in resolving comments over the last year. This has involved all collection staff and managers undertaking customer service training, with a focus of putting the resident to the centre of our operations. Managers have also undertaken additional training to ensure that they respond to complaints more rapidly and to a higher standard, thus reducing complaints escalating to stage 2. This had led the service resolving all 82% of complaints within target and only 4% of complaints being escalated.

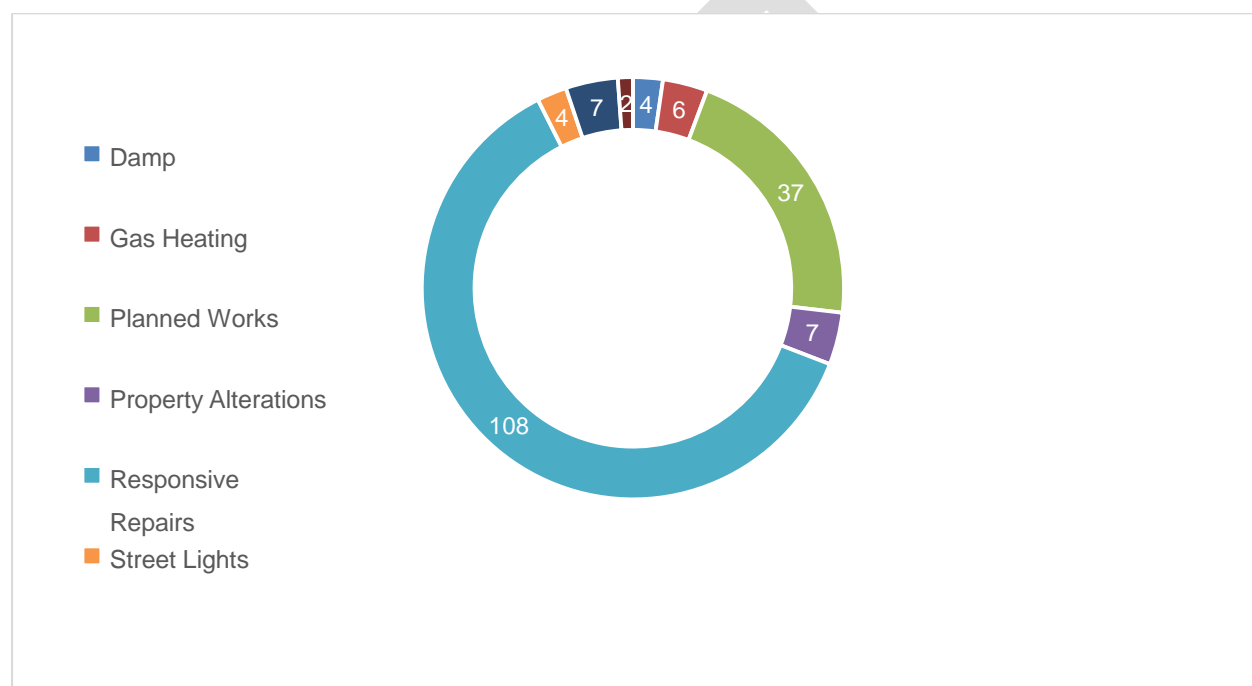
The service was very pleased to see a noticeable increase in the number of formal compliments this year. The service was pleased to see the number of informal thanks and praise received both in writing and directly to collection staff explode during March 2020 in relation to continuing to provide a service, even though reduced, during the earlier days of Covid-19 lockdown. Due to the nature that these were received it was not possible to log them, however they have been reproduced on the sides of two of our collection vehicles.

Complaints are currently running at around 1.5 per working day, generated from collecting in the region of 14,600 bins each day. Given that some complaints are generated by circumstances beyond our control such as traffic and street layout, I would anticipate this level of complaints may continue. The service remains committed to responding to complaints on time and to a satisfactory standard, and to reducing the number of complaints as far as possible.

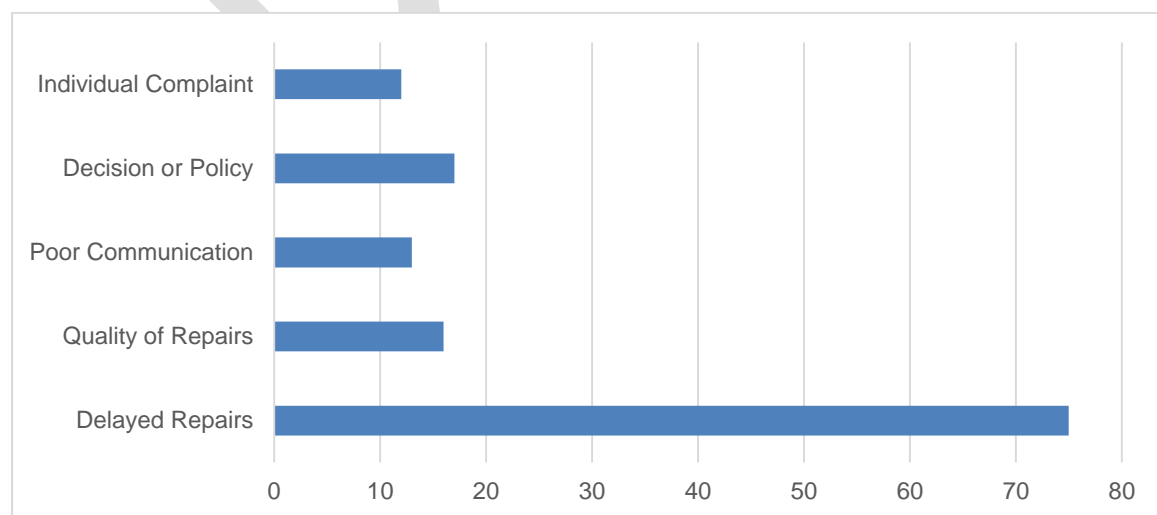
## Housing Maintenance & Assets

Waste	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2019-20	175	14	2	95%	11	12
2018-19	124	8	2	58%	28	6
2017-18	89	4	1	43%	11	4

### Housing Maintenance: Cases by sub-service



### Housing Maintenance: Resolution Theme



# Housing Assets & Maintenance - Service Comments

***From Lynn Thomas, Head of Service:***

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During the 2019/20 financial year, as a service, we completed over 15,000 responsive repair jobs and carried out planned work to the value of just over £10 million. We are acutely aware that there has been a 37% increase in complaints recorded by the service compared to last year. However, this still represents a small number in relation to the volume of work we carry out. Whilst we believe the increase could be a direct result of the improved recording of customer complaints, we clearly have distinct areas to improve in our service.

I indicated in last year's annual complaints report the measures we were putting in place to improve the services complaint handling. The first phase was targeted at responding to complaints within target timescales and you can see we have made vast improvements to this. In 2019/20 we responded to 95% of complaints within the target timescale, up from 58% the previous year.

We have also worked closely with the corporate complaints team and provided further refresher training to our staff, reviewed our process on how we manage and deal with complaints, created and distributed a guide to all of our staff 'who does what' for clarity, created new comprehensive complaint response templates to ensure our responses are uniform and reviewed the complaint 'themes' which allows us to report and analyse issues more accurately. The service managers now review complaints handling on a monthly basis to identify trends and seek to address recurring issues.

The highest proportion of root causes continues to be service delays and poor communication; we have investigated this as part of analysing our complaints. The Estates & Facilities Service Review commenced in June in 2019, through this we have identified six main themes for improvement which include Communication & Engagement and Effectiveness & Efficiency.

We have developed action plans to improve the service as part of the review and we have ensured that the analysis of the root causes of complaints are included within these, some of which have already been implemented. Through these actions we have already seen an improvement in some of our Key Performance Indicators (for instance delivering the most urgent repairs on time) and we believe these will continue to improve when we have implemented all the changes we are making to our service.

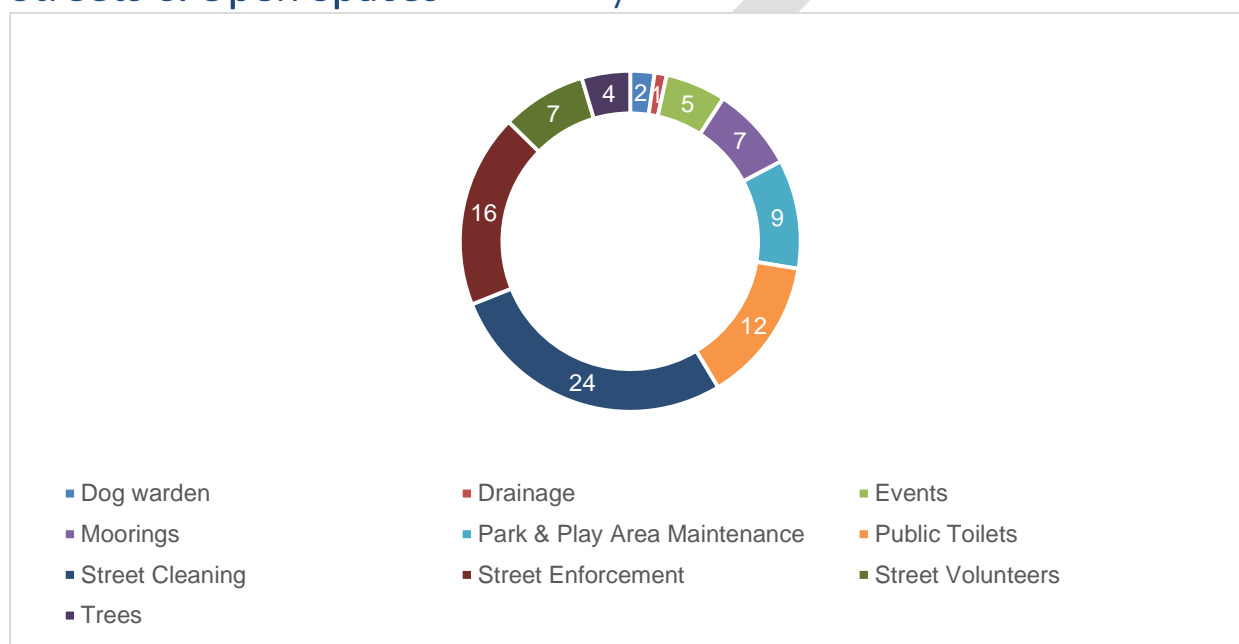
We are also working on how we communicate and engage with our tenants and leaseholders; we have presented the service review action plans to the tenant and leasehold representatives and received a positive response. Examples of these actions are reviewing our internal communication methods and the completion of the housing management system upgrade and new repairs appointment scheduling system which will improve how we interact with our customers.

We are in the 'implementation' period of our service update and there is still much work to do but we remain confident that this will reduce the number of complaints about our services and improve how we respond to those that we do receive.

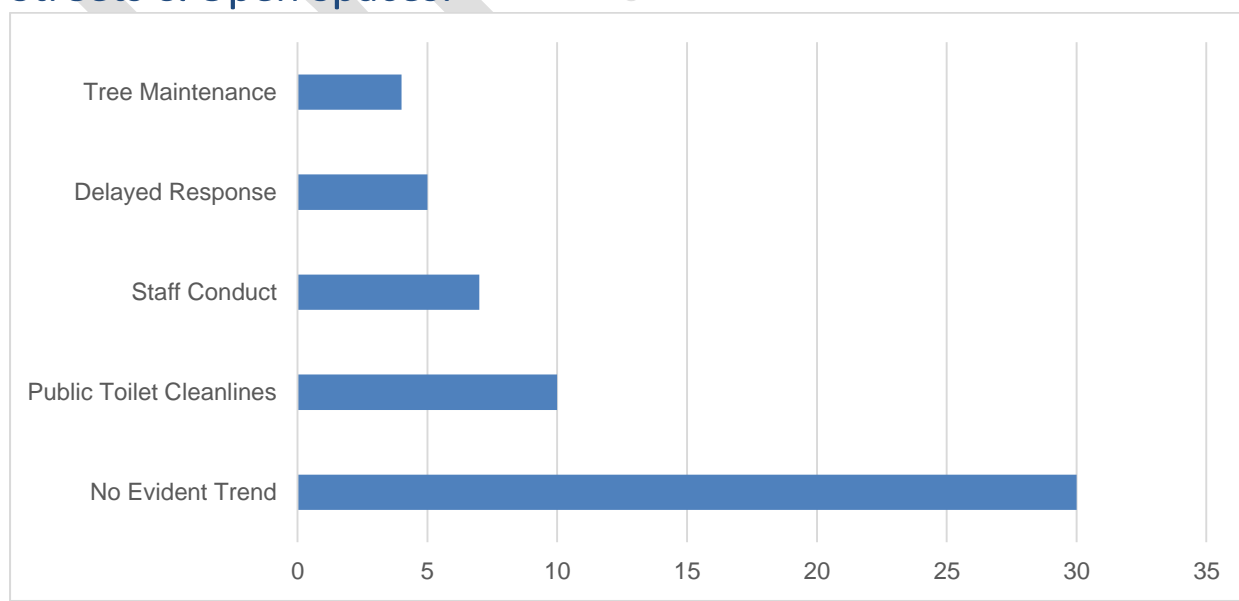
## Environmental Services – Streets & Open Spaces

Streets & Open Spaces	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2019-20	88	6	3	76%	9	37
2018-19	100	2	4	59%	11	29
2017-18	62	5	-	56%	8	54

### Streets & Open Spaces: Cases by sub-service



### Streets & Open Spaces: Resolution Themes



## Streets & Open Spaces - Service Comments

***From Joel Carre, Head of Environmental Services:***

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**Streets and Open Spaces** (S&OS) employs 130 staff and is responsible for managing the city's streets and parks and open spaces (300 hectares), including public tree stock (c240,000), play areas (c80); public toilets (20) and market and street trading pitches; and providing daily street cleansing, grounds maintenance and enforcement services.

Of the 88 service complaints received in 2019/20, the highest volumes related to the three following service areas: street cleansing/ grounds maintenance operation: 24 cases (2018/19 – 42 cases); public realm enforcement: 13 case (2018/19 – 16 cases) and public toilets: 11 cases (2018/19 – 10 cases). The remaining 40 complaint cases covered a cross-section of other service areas across S&OS.

The highest area of complaints (24 cases) related to S&OS street cleansing/ grounds maintenance service. This large frontline service employs c70 operatives, who provide a 365 day a year, city wide operation, including emptying c1,000 public litter bins a day, cleaning all the city's streets and pavements and cutting the city's grass. Given the scale of the operation; and with a population of c130,000 residents and a historic city core that attracts 8 million visitors a year, I do not consider the number of street cleansing related complaints (24 cases, equating to fewer than one per fortnight) to be high and there are no particular trends or causal themes.

Examples of complaints received ranged from damage to residents vehicles caused by S&OS mowers throwing up stones when verge grass cutting (2 cases – both of which were referred to the Council's insurer's to resolve); to the use of petrol operated leaf blowers causing noise pollution (2 cases – service has commenced replacing petrol with electric powered leaf blowers which are less noisy).

The second highest area of complaint (13 cases) relates to the S&OS public realm enforcement service, which is responsible for investigating and taking enforcement action against environmental crime in the city, including littering, fly tipping and dog fouling. In 2019/20 the service undertook 2,266 enforcement investigations (2018/19 - 2,000) and issued 634 fixed penalty notices (2018/19 – 662), including 371 for littering (2018/19 - 392) and 72 for small scale fly tipping (2018/19 – 71). Given the scale and enforcement nature of the operation, the number of complaints (13, or less than 15% of the service total) I do not consider this to be a high number and there are no particular trends or causal themes.

The third highest area of complaint (11 cases) related to the city's public toilets. A large number of the city's 20 public toilet facilities are in older buildings, which require major capital investment and suffer from regular acts of vandalism. A number of complaints related to the condition of the toilets in Silver Street, which are the subject of a £500K capital investment which is expected to be undertaken in 2021/22.



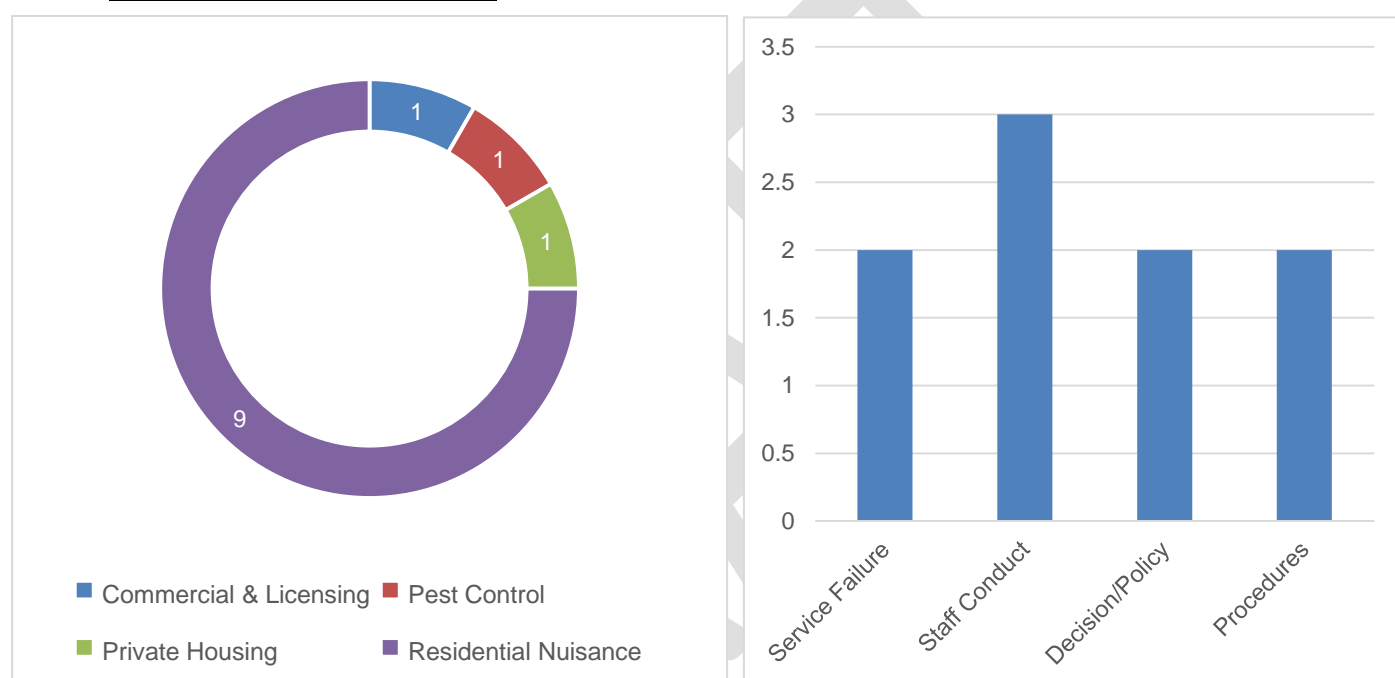
In terms of the 5 S&OS complaints escalated to Stage 2, these relate to the following specific services areas: trees, toilets, environmental enforcement, markets and grounds maintenance. Of the 5 Stage 2 investigation outcomes, 4 of the complaints were not upheld and 1 was partially upheld. The partially upheld complaint related to poor communication from the S&OS tree service. In response the service introduced a new web reporting form to ensure complaint cases could not be closed until the case had been responded to and the form completed.

Finally, the S&OS service is in the process of introducing a new digital operational management system, including the deployment of mobile working devices to all frontline staff. The roll out started in February, 2020, with street cleansing operations and should be completed across the remaining S&OS services by January, 2021. This new system will enable customers to report public realm issues and view delivery performance online in real time. These changes will enable the service to deliver a better and more efficient customer service going forward.

## Environmental Services – Environmental Health

Environmental Health	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2019-20	12	3	1	67%	2	2
2018-19	18	2	2	39%	4	1
2017-18	16	4	3	36%	2	-

### Environmental Health: Cases by sub-service & Root Causes



### Service comments from Joel Carre – Head of Environmental Services

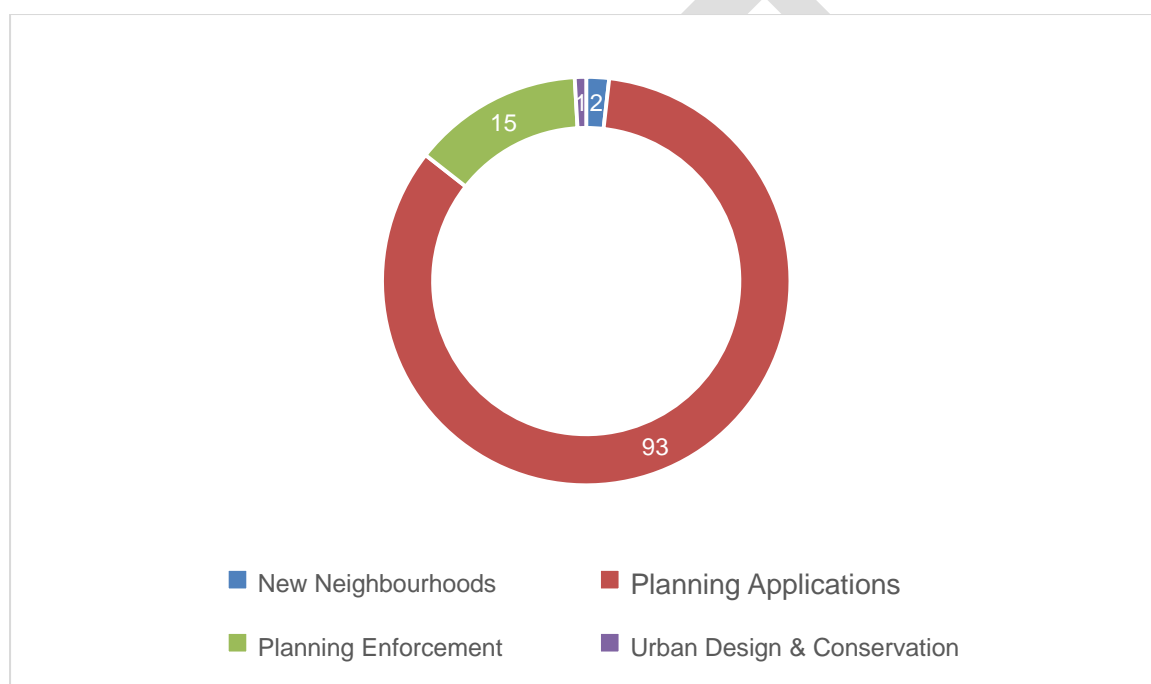
**Environmental Health (EH)** complaint figures have remained broadly the same since last year, with a total of 12 cases in 2019/20; and 18 in 2018/19. I consider this a low figure, given the high volume (4,000 cases) of private rental sector housing, noise disturbance, taxi and food standards enforcement and licensing cases managed by the service in 2019/20 (2018/19 - c4,000). From an analysis of the 12 cases, there are no particular trends or causal themes.

In terms of the 3 EH complaints escalated to Stage 2, these relate to the following cases: noise disturbance involving rowers on the River Cam; noise disturbance involving a neighbour's barking dog; and a private rental housing tenant dispute. Of the 3 Stage 2 investigation outcomes, the 2 noise disturbance complaints were not upheld and the private rental tenant dispute was partially upheld. The partially upheld complaint related to poor communication between the Council officer and a private rental tenant and their landlord's agent, which has been addressed through training with both the officer concerned and wider private rented housing team.

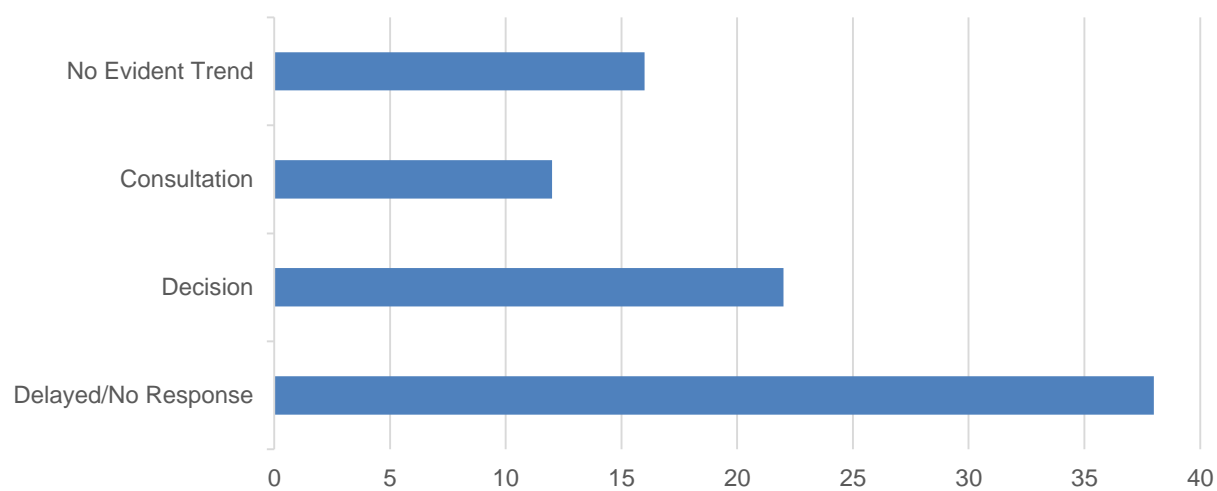
## Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service

Planning Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2019-20	111	11	-	41%	2	-
2018-19	18	2	2	39%	4	1
2017-18	16	4	3	36%	2	-

### Planning: Cases by sub-service



## Planning: Resolution Themes



# Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service - Service Comments

***From Sharon Brown, Assistant Director***

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The performance data for the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (with regard to Cambridge City) shows that there was a significant increase in the overall number of complaints received during 2019-20 compared to the previous two years. This was predominantly an increase in Stage 1 complaints -79 out of a total of 106 complaints. There was a small increase in the number of Stage 2 complaints -an additional 2 giving a total of 9 compared to 7 from the previous year. However, it should be noted that no ICI investigations were initiated during the 2019/20 year, which is a big improvement on the previous two years and reflects the fact that some older, complex complaints that pre-dated the shared service, have now been resolved. Most of the Stage 2 complaints relate to more complex issues that take longer to resolve.

The majority of complaints were planning applications related - 86 out of a total of 106 complaints, with 13 planning enforcement related. The majority of complaints focused on delays or lack of responses (42%), with the root causes mainly due to poor communications (35%) and delays (32%) .

The complaints performance reflects the position that the Development Management service has been in for the past 12 months in that this has been a period of considerable change during the shared service transformation process. This resulted in very wide-ranging changes in staffing, process and system changes. In particular, a number of vacancies arose as a result of the shared service structure implementation – this left the service short of experienced, permanent staff. This in turn meant that applications were not always managed to the timescales or in the ways that more experienced, permanent staff may have managed them, with applicants experiencing delays and other communications issues.

The new shared service structure is now bedding down, the major ICT projects have been completed and recent recruitment has been successful, with more experienced staff being recruited. It is therefore considered that the service is now in a much better position generally, with an improved level of stability than in the last two years in particular.

In recent months, the Development Management team have been focusing on clearing the backlog of over 26 week householder applications as these had resulted in a high proportion of Stage 1 complaints received. All over-target applications are now being tracked individually by area team managers. The service is also focusing on addressing customer service issues highlighted by the complaints performance as a priority. Complaints performance is being

closely monitored and the service has appointed a performance monitoring officer, Matt Hull to oversee this as part of his role.

A customer service improvement project has been instigated which involves staff across the service. A number of improvements are being introduced to the complaints process. A 24 hour call back system has been trialled for SCDC with respect to initial customer E-Mails raising issues about delays. Heading these off early has significantly reduced the number of complaints that then become formal Stage 1s. This system is now about to be rolled out to the City.

There are still issues (as at Spring 2020) with a validation backlog in the Technical Support team which are giving rise to complaints currently. This is a legacy of the ICT go live in February 2020 and the residual issues which impacted on this team the most. However, external contractors have been brought in to provide additional support to clear the backlog and this is being actively monitored.

In terms of the number of complaints dealt with within target, although the 2019-20 data shows that the number of complaints responded to within target were low (35%), the changes described above, notably the increased number of staff within the service, particularly more experienced staff and the improvements in complaints performance monitoring provide more confidence that the situation will improve going forward. This is demonstrated by the fact that Q4 showed that 67% of complaints responses were responded to within target.

In conclusion, whilst the complaints numbers for 2019-20 were higher than we would expect or be comfortable with, for all the reasons set out above, it is perhaps understandable in the context of the changes that were happening within the service. With the service now in a more settled position and a variety of service improvements being progressed, including with regard to customer service and complaints performance and monitoring, performance is improving and should continue to improve further.

## Customer Services

Customer Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2019-20	29	2	-	93%	8	29
2018-19	43	1	1	91%	38	58
2017-18	36	-	-	88%	11	30

## Customer Services - Service comments

### *From Clarissa Norman, Customer Services Operations Manager*

In 2019-20 Customer services handled in excess of 300,000 contacts via telephone, email and face to face and received 34 complaints. Complaints therefore equates to 0.014% of contacts received.

I would consider the percentage of complaints very low in relation to the amount of contacts received. Our service area supported considerable changes in encouraging customers to channel shift and be more proactive in self serving digitally. This has been evidenced by the customer portal integration with the Trees team and changes with the inform360 scripts to ensure that customers are provided with concise answers to their queries, particularly service requests that can be actioned by the customer themselves (emails, submission of webforms)

A more collaborative working approach was introduced this year between services, Estates and Facilities staff spent more time with Customer Service Advisors to ensure that officers could share experiences and learn both sides of the processes for each team. This joint working was vital in ironing out misaligned approaches and we have seen successful changes due to these visits and more co-location working has been proposed.

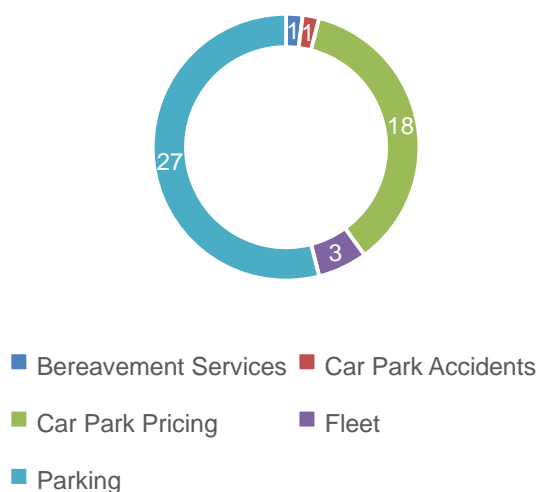
The main causes of these complaints were service failure at 30%, poor communication 24% and staff conduct 15%. Due to the collaborative work made with neighbouring services, it is expected that service failure and poor communication percentage will drop following these changes and provide customers with a more seamless journey when contacting customer services.

Despite the number of complaints submitted, we also received a high number of compliments through the Case Tracker system (28) and 7,993 positive comments captured via Govmetric, equating to 2.6% of contacts- considerably more than the number of complaints raised.

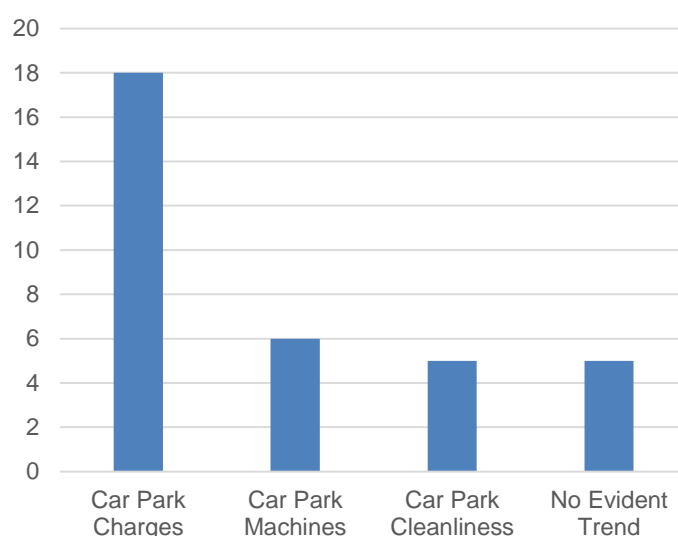
## Commercial Services

Commercial Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2019-20	50	2	-	41%	-	5
2018-19	66	7	-	99%	4	4
2017-18	38	2	-	71%	2	-8

Cases by Sub-Service



Resolution Theme



## Commercial Services – Service Comments

### **From James Elms, Head of Commercial Services**

This year has seen a reduction in complaints across Commercial Services from 66 to 50. For context, the service as a whole has in the region of 2,300,000 customers

The service has one complaint for every 66,000 customers. As shown in the graph above, the largest cause for complaint in regards to policy, is for car park charges and this is outside of what the operational service can positively affect. It is worth noting that over half of these complaints were raised within the first quarter of the year, suggesting that residents adjusted to the new pricing policy as the year progressed.

The garage at Waterbeach has continued to grow its positive feedback now sitting at 95.9% on the Good Garage Scheme.

Bereavement continues to see a year on year decline with only one complaint last year involving a rose that would not take.

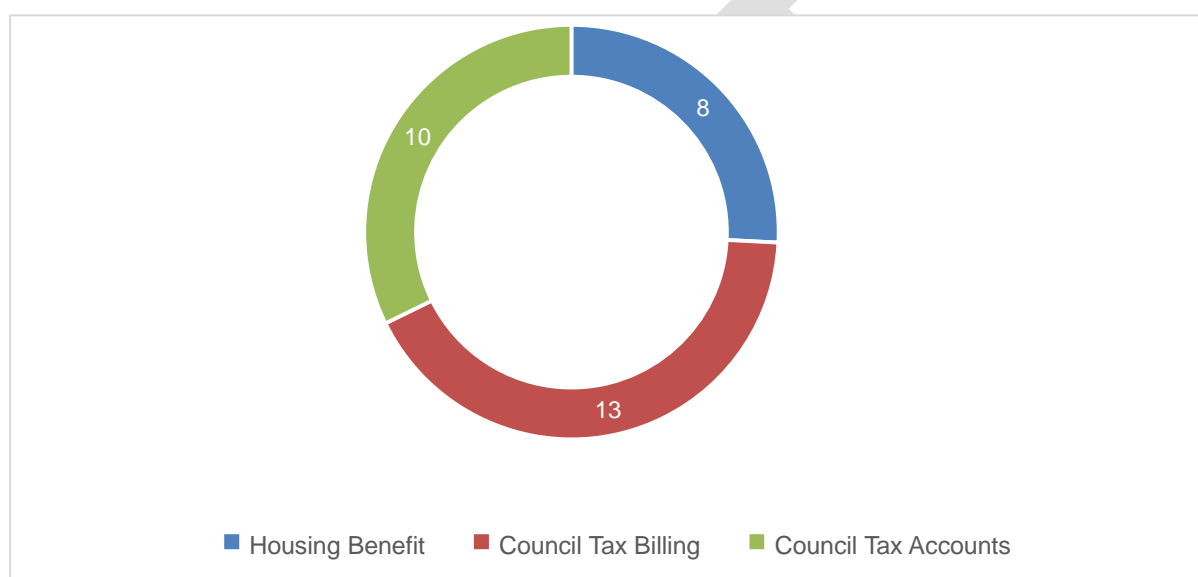
Procurement had no complaints last year, quite an achievement as this can be a contentious service of the Council ensuring that the organisation remains compliant and legal.



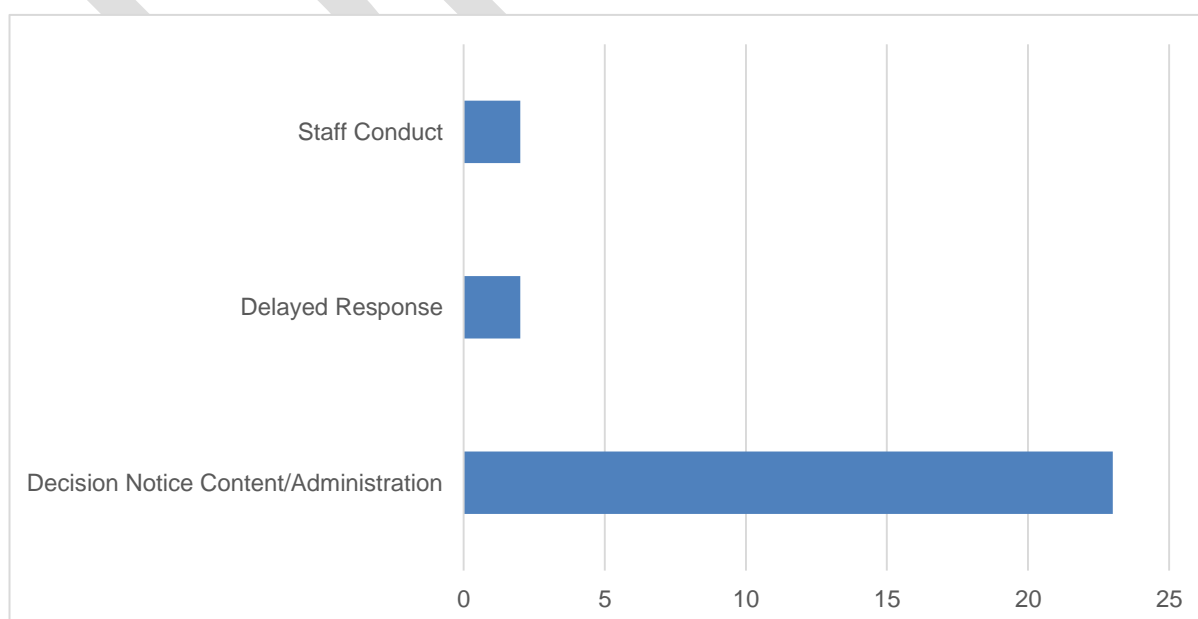
## Revenues & Benefits

Revenues & Benefits	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2019-20	31	4	-	100%	2	18
2018-19	35	1	1	97%	13	15
2017-18	41	1	2	94%	-	26

### Revenues & Benefits: Cases by Sub-Service



### Revenues & Benefits: Resolution Themes



## Revenues & Benefits – Service Comments

### ***From Alison Cole, Head of Revenues & Benefits***

Given the sheer volume of documents issued, with a high number of these in pursuance of non-payment of either Council Tax, Business rates or Housing Benefit repayments due to the Council, the number of complaints remains consistently low and demonstrates the sensitive way the team handles this area of work. During 2019/20, the total number of documents sent from the Revenues and Benefit teams was over 211,000, including:

- For Council Tax: 158,000 documents sent including council tax bills, reminders, final notices and summons.
- For Business Rates: 6,500 documents.
- For Benefits: 47,000 decision notices sent, including
- 7,000 Housing Benefit overpayment letters seeking recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit.

There has been a further reduction compared to previous years complaints totals and 100% were responded to within target this year.

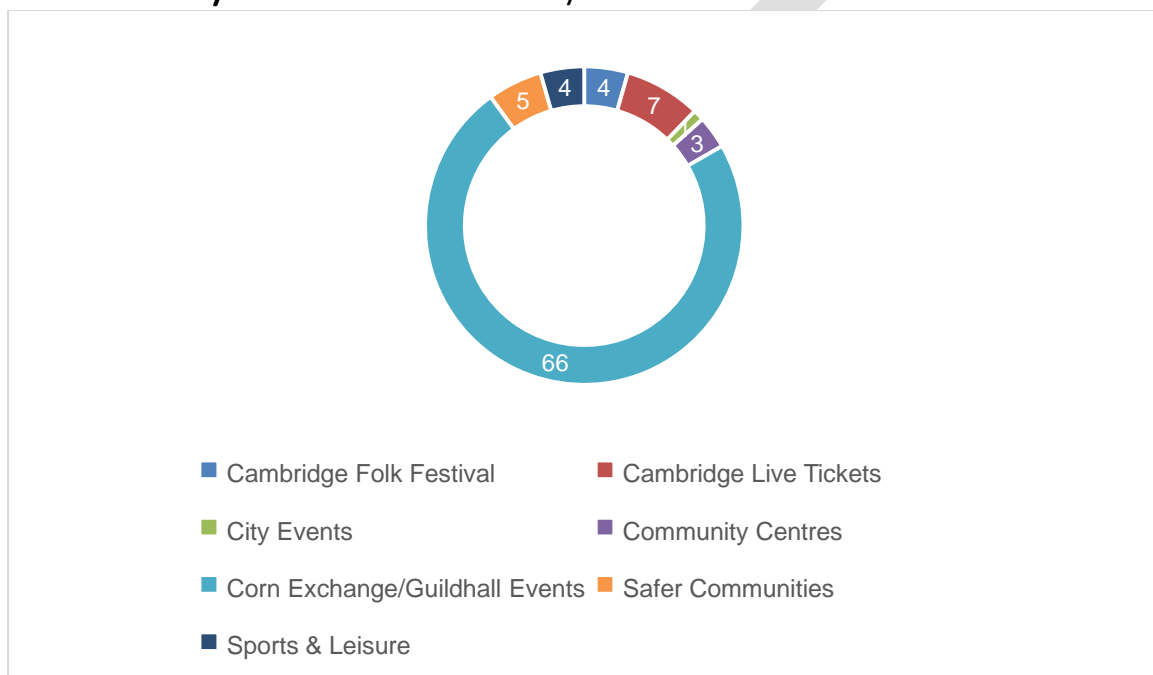
During 2019/20 the team has received complaints from customers unhappy about receiving reminders and summonses for non-payment of council tax.

When reviewing root causes identified, one of the trends detected was that the complaint was actually a legal challenge against a decision, where we referred the complainant to the Valuation Office Tribunal Service for the complainant to appeal the decision, and as such should not have been recorded as a complaint.

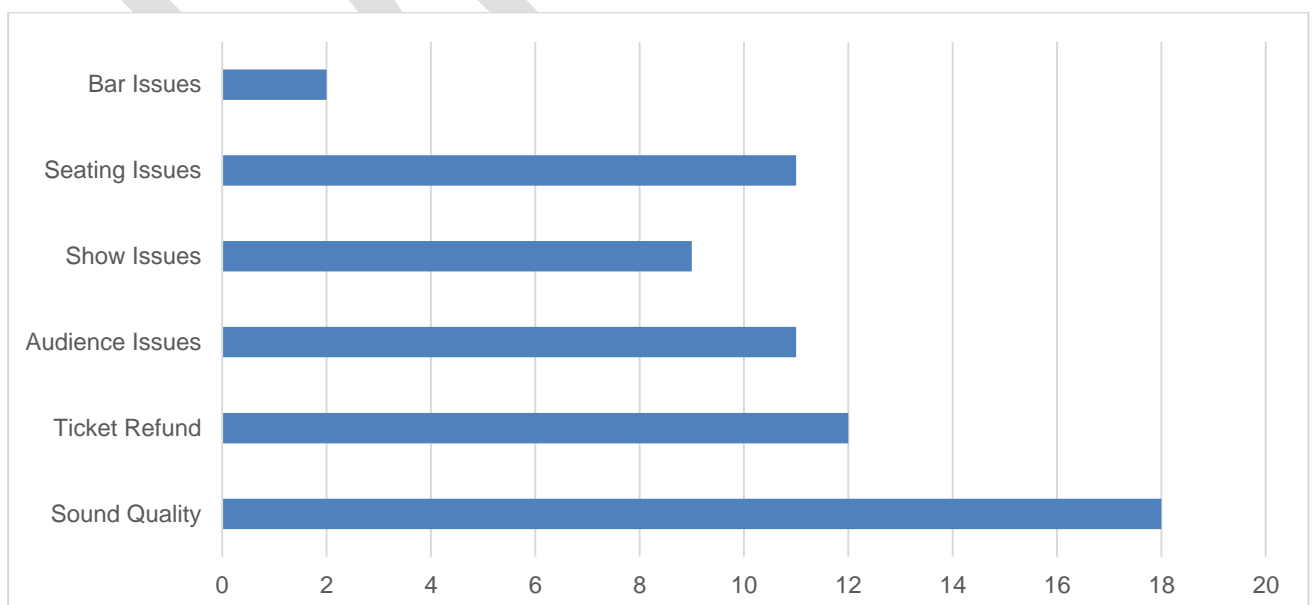
## Community Services

Community Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2019-20	90	4	-	89%	4	15
2018-19	10	1	-	50%	8	10
2017-18	11	1	1	70%	2	27

## Community Services: Cases by Sub-Service



## Community Services: Resolution Themes



# Community Services - Service comments

***From Debbie Kaye, Head of Community Services***

The number of complaints received by the service increased significantly in 2019/20 as the Council took Cambridge Live back in-house. 78 of the 90 complaints received by the service related to Cambridge Live, and of those, 66 were regarding the Corn Exchange.

Over the financial year of 2019-20, a total of 162,659 tickets were purchased by customers wishing to attend a wide variety of events available at the Corn exchange.

Complaints from customers are submitted into a feedback system, then they are automatically assigned to the Head of Venues initially. They review the case, either responding themselves or reallocating to a suitable alternate manager within the team to investigate and respond. This process has been valuable as it allows the Head of Venues to view all incoming feedback (complaints, comments and compliments) and allows opportunities for improvements within the service.

60% of the complaints received were specific to the complainants individual views or experiences, making it difficult to identify precise areas of action. However, from the resolution themes added to the system, two areas were highlighted as complaint trends, these involved the sound quality and the seating at the Corn Exchange.

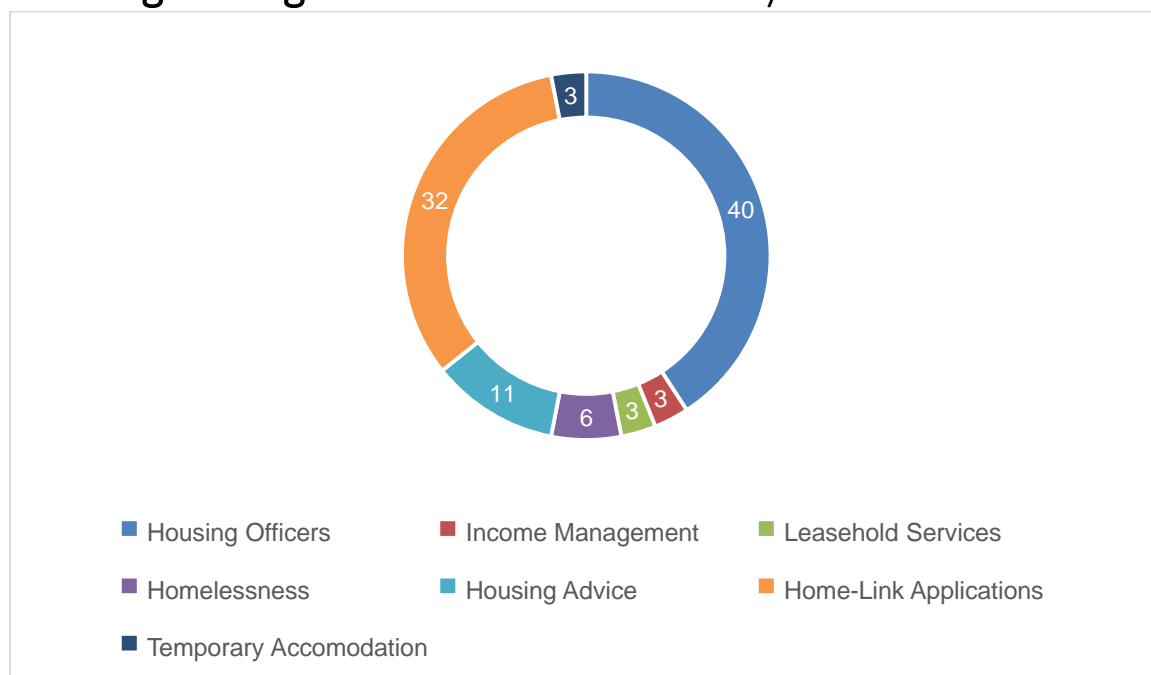
Complaints regarding the sound have been regularly received and we have identified and investigated this appropriately. It was found that the sound issues were not in relation to our own sound equipment within the venue, but rather promoters who insisted on using their own equipment oppose to ours, an attempt to save on costs. Due to the number of complaints received we have now altered the venue hire contract as a result. The price of venue hire has increased to include our own sound system to combat this with an aim to see less submitted cases relating to poor sound quality over the coming year.

The second main area was regards to seating complaints, generally this was due to poor visibility from seats due to people in front, or the proximity of the seating in certain areas. We have made adjustments where possible and have altered the seating plan to remove the front left and right corner seats to prevent a restricted view. This has helped with the number of complaints submitted; however as our flat floor seating is an area where the chairs are at their narrowest and linked together, feedback will continued to be received from individuals complaining about lack of room. In the longer term this needs to be considered and a complete new seating system will need to be planned for, however making the seats larger will also reduce the capacity, which in turn decreases our financial return.

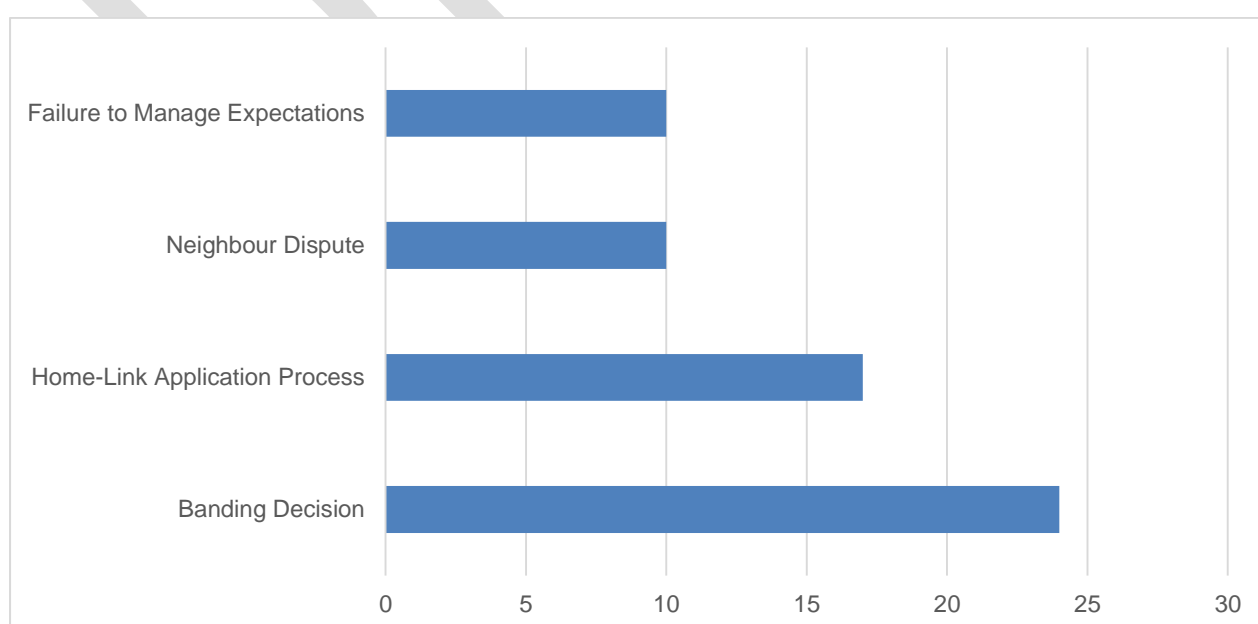
## Housing Management Services

Housing Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2019-20	98	10	3	85%	14	29
2018-19	100	16	4	75%	32	21
2017-18	93	3	5	68%	12	19

### Housing Management Services: Cases by Sub-Service



### Housing Services: Resolution Themes



# Housing Services – Service Comments

***From David Greening, Head of Housing***

The Housing service manages close to 8,400 properties within the City, and has placed 591 residents into temporary accommodation during the year. We have also handled 897 homeless applications, had 1,650 new applicants join the Home-Link register, and opened 1,026 housing advice cases in the year. Given these numbers, the amount of complaints raised is low in comparison.

Although the total number of complaints for the year has not reduced much on the year before, the number progressing to Stage 2 has dropped. There has also been a higher proportion of complaints that are dealt with within target. Pleasingly, the number of compliments has also nearly doubled.

As a service, we welcome complaints, as they help us to identify service weaknesses and opportunities to improve. We are therefore less concerned about the overall numbers received, as the resulting outcomes. Over the past 12 months Housing Services have sought to improve the way we handle the complaints we do receive. Our Policy and Performance (P&P) Officers have implemented a number of new initiatives to help improve how complaints are managed. This includes significant data analysis to help improve complaint categorisation (and subsequent evaluation); the introduction of bi-monthly meetings with staff to look at lessons learned (focusing particularly on how we can prevent escalations); and in January 2020 the roll-out of a new service-wide Complaints Handling Procedure. The Complaints Handling Procedure seeks to standardise how staff respond to complaints, and (with the removal of the ICI stage in early 2020) seeks to satisfy the complainant at first approach, preventing escalation to the Ombudsmen. Key elements of the procedure covered:

- the importance of discussing the complaint directly with the customer, in order to isolate the key issue(s) and the customer's preferred resolution;
- the role of the Officer in making sure that a complainant feels 'heard';
- acknowledging fault where it is valid;
- in a minority of cases offering financial recompense;
- ensuring any necessary service changes are progressed.

Upcoming P&P initiatives include the introduction of telephone call monitoring software to enable us to evaluate call-handling; and the roll-out of Call Handling Best Practice Guidance.

The following services have not been reported on in detail due to the low number of complaints raised within them. However a brief summary of performance is provided.

### Property Services

Property Services received two stage one complaints which were both resolved within target.

### Human Resources

Human Resources received one stage one complaints which was resolved within target.

### Legal Services

Legal Services received three stage one complaints, and one stage 2 complaint, all of which were resolved within target.

The complaint escalated to stage two is a long running dispute around a property boundary, which is nearing conclusion.

### Finance

Finance received one stage one complaint, and one stage two complaint which were both resolved within target. The stage two complaint related to a tendering process not being followed correctly. This has now been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant.

### Building Control

Building Control received two stage one complaints, both were resolved within target.

### Multi-Service Complaints

Multi-Service Complaints	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target
2019-20	33	3	4	79%
2018-19	83	12	3	67%
2017-18	32	5	2	41%

Multi-Service complaints tend to be more complex and involve more officer time to investigate, which in previous years has contributed to a low number of complaints responded to within target. This year has seen a vast improvement in this measure, which is encouraging and highlights that staff are getting used to working together to resolve complaints.

There has been a reduction in the number of multi-service complaints. This is due to a retraining of the complaints triage to ensure that cases truly are multi-service and require an input from multiple departments.

The most common areas involved in multi-service complaints are Housing (14), and Estates & Facilities (11). This is to be expected as Estates & Facilities can often involve officers from the Housing service if the complaints concern decisions made by that service.

When a multi-service complaint is allocated, all Heads of Service involved are contacted to establish a lead officer who will then co-ordinate an investigation and response, including input from all relevant services involved.

The multi-service complaints that were escalated to stage three, were all raised by one individual who has a long standing dispute with the Council and its moorings policy. None of these complaints were upheld or partially upheld by the ICI. This complainant pursued their complaint with the LGSCO (Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman), who also did not uphold the complaint.

### **Non-Cambridge City Council**

In addition to cases received relating to City Council services, 131 cases were raised relating to issues for authorities or services not provided by the City Council. The most common cause of these cases relates to Highways issues. In all cases, complainants were responded to signposting them to the correct authority to deal with their case.

In an effort to reduce this number and signpost the customer to the correct authority first time, we have revised the text guidance on the complaints web page which customers navigate prior to raising their case.

This text addresses the most common Non-CCC issues and where to register these complaints. The most common Non-CCC complaints relate to Highways, Bus services and Parking tickets.



## Independent Complaints Investigator (ICI)

During 2019-20, 14 complaints were escalated to the ICI by complainants dissatisfied with the responses provided at stages one and two. Five of these escalated cases were not pursued by the ICI, with two being passed back to be resolved by the council. The remaining nine complaints were investigated by the independent investigators and two were partially upheld.

One complainant escalated three different complaints to the ICI, none of which were upheld. The complainant continued to pursue their complaint with the Local Government Ombudsman, who also did not uphold the complaint.

Partially upheld Stage 3 complaints in 2019-20		
Service	Date	Decision
Housing Advice	24 <sup>th</sup> April 2017	Partially upheld
Environmental Health	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2017	Partially upheld

## Partially Upheld ICI Complaints – case summaries

### **Housing Maintenance & Assets 16/12/2019**

#### ***Complaint: Length of time taken to repair a shower in the property***

Escalated to ICI as complainant believed that their complaint had not been investigated in its entirety at stages one and two, and the Council had ignored issues raised within the complaint. The tenant believed that the noise from the shower once repaired was negatively impacting upon their wellbeing, and the Council had not taken this into consideration when installing a replacement pump. The complaint also mentioned that they wished for a bath to be fitted in place of a shower.

- ICI recognised that a significant amount of time had elapsed between the resident reporting their shower, and the repair taking place. The ICI recognised that the Council had acted in line with policies, but could have taken a more proactive approach to resolving the problem with the shower.
- Following the ICI report, arrangements were made to check over the newly installed shower to ensure it was functioning as well as it could, and the resident was referred to the Occupational Health department at the County Council to discuss adaptations to their bathroom. CAM399855

## Housing Management Services: Home-Link 14/10/19

### *Complaint: Closure of Home-Link application*

Complainant escalated their case to ICI because they did not consider their complaint to be resolved at stages one or two of the complaints process. The complainant requested that their Housing application be kept open due to a medical need, however the Council closed the complainants application as they failed to provide requested documents on more than one occasion. Complainant was unhappy that they had paid money for a doctor's note, and we would not accept that note.

- ICI report stated that the City Council had followed its housing application policy. However, the ICI recommended that the Council refund the £25 for the medical note to the complainant as a gesture of goodwill. CAM947021

### Number of ICI Complaints wholly upheld/partially upheld between 2017-2020

Period	Partially upheld	Wholly Upheld
2019-20	2	-
2018-19	5	7
2017-18	1* + 7	1

\*Complaints carried over from the previous financial year

At Civic Affairs Committee in October 2019, it was agreed to remove the third stage of the complaints process. This means that from 1 April 2020, following Stage 2 the next step of escalation is to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

## Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

If customers are not satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled they can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's office. The LGSCO investigates complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and other bodies.

In 2019-20 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman received 13 complaints relating to Cambridge City Council. Of these, 4 were treated as complaints where a decision was applicable. As a result of the LGO's detailed investigations, 2 were upheld and 2 were not upheld.

The LGSCO were satisfied that 100% of their recommendations from 2019-20 cases were implemented by the Council.

Department	No of Complaints Received	Decision
Revenues & Benefits	3	2 Closed after initial enquiries 1 Referred back for local resolution
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	4	1 Closed after initial enquiries 1 Referred back for local resolution 2 <i>Not upheld</i>
Housing	2	<b>1 Upheld</b> 1 Advice given to complainant (signposted to complaints handling)
Planning & Development	2	<b>1 Upheld</b> 1 Closed after initial enquiries
Corporate & Other Services	2	2 Closed after initial enquiries
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2 Upheld</b>

### LGSCO Upheld Case summaries

The LGSCO provides information on all cases submitted and investigated on their website. Summaries have been provided below, full information on each case can be found on the LGSCO website by searching for the reference number.

#### **Planning Services**

***Complaint: 19 002 891 - 27/02/20***

Complainant's neighbours applied for permission to erect a two storey extension at the rear of the property. As part of the application process, the complainant was given the opportunity to submit representations. The Council approved the application and made reference to representations from other residents, but not those of the complainant.

After the approval of the application, the complainant contacted the Council to state that they never confirmed receipt of her representations. Complainant wrote to the Council again to bring to their attention that the development would cause a loss of daylight, be too dominating, and cause overshadowing. The complainant also stated that nobody from the Council visited prior to the determination of the planning application. Following the formal complaint being raised to the Council, a number of errors were admitted to including the initial not taking the representations into account. The complaint was handled at Stage 2 of the Councils complaints process, and a number of extensions to a target date were applied, which failed to be met.

In seeking to resolve the complaint, the Council met with the applicants and suggested some alterations to the first floor window in the plans, however the applicants did not agree to these, despite the Council offering to pay for them. This failure to agree a remedy, along with the failure during the complaint handling led to the complaint being upheld.

**The LGSCO recommended the following actions**

- Within one month of the final decision the Council will write to the complainant and offer to pay £1000 to recognise the failure to include the planning condition to protect their amenity and the ongoing injustice caused by this fault. The £1000 should be paid if the offer is accepted by the complainant.
- Within three months of the final decision the Council will provide evidence to the Ombudsman of the improvements it has made to the planning application process, and review the complaints handling process to identify any improvements that can be made.

**Housing Services**

***Complaint: 18 016 753 - 08/08/19***

Complainant raised a complaint due to being allocated a property below another tenant with a history of anti-social behaviour. Complainant felt that an adequate risk assessment was not carried out prior to allocating the property. Complainant is considered a vulnerable tenant by the Council due to recorded mental health issues. These issues were not taken into consideration alongside the history of behaviour from the tenant above the allocated property.

The Council claimed to have dealt with the anti-social behaviour and offered the complainant four alternative properties which were deemed suitable, as well as respite stays away from his property. The Council consulted LGSCO guidance on remedies, but only from a distress point of view. There is a further guidance section on Housing Remedies which was not consulted. The complainant was insistent that they did not want to move, and that their neighbour above who was causing the issues should be the one to move to alternate accommodation.

**The LGSCO recommended the following actions**

- Within one month of the final decision the Council will apologise to the complainant and pay £3800 for the injustice caused in allocating them the flat. This is calculated as £350 per month for 11 months from February-December 2018.

### **Number of LGSCO cases, yearly comparisons 2017 – 20**

The below table shows the number of complaints referred to the LGSCO, against how many cases were investigated, and how many of those investigated were upheld.

Year	Total Enquiries Received	Cases Investigated	Cases Upheld
2019-20	13	4	2
2018-19	13	3	3
2017-18	19	3	2

Reasons to not investigate a complaint include the complaint not being made within 12 months of the issue occurring, complainants not providing sufficient information to allow the LGSCO to investigate, and in some cases, the complaint not being passed through the Council's complaints procedure first before escalation. In these instances, the LGSCO will give advice, and signpost complainants to sources of further information.

### **Complaints under the Councillors' Code of Conduct**

Councillors must adhere to the Council's Code of Conduct whenever they are conducting Council business, representing the Council or conducting the business of the office to which they were elected. The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to ensure high standards of ethics and conduct are maintained and that councillors treat everybody in an equal capacity and with respect, ensuring at all times that the integrity of the Council is not compromised in any way.

Complaints about councillors are considered initially by the Council's Monitoring Officer (who is also the Head of Legal Practice). When the Monitoring Officer receives a complaint about breach of the Code of Conduct, they consult one of two "Independent Persons" appointed by the Council. The role of the "Independent Persons" is to introduce external scrutiny of the complaints process. The Monitoring Officer can respond to a complaint, can commission a formal investigation or can refer it for consideration by the Council's Standards Sub-Committee. The Council's Standards Sub-Committee is made up of three Councillors.

### **Councillor Conduct Complaints, 2019/20**

During 2019-20, the Council received three complaints about the conduct of Councillors. In all three cases, the Councillors involved offered apologies to the complainants, and it was possible to achieve an informal outcome to the complaint without the need for formal investigation.

There were two complaints in 2018/19 and three complaints in 2017/18.

To find out more about the Council's Code of Conduct visit our website or contact the Council's Monitoring Officer Tom Lewis [tom.lewis@3csharedservices.org](mailto:tom.lewis@3csharedservices.org)

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