

Item

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK REPORT 2020-21



To:

Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources
Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Committee

Report by:

Tony Stead, Business & Development Manager, Customer Services

Wards affected:

All

1. Introduction / Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an analysis of the complaints and compliments received by the Council during 2020/21 under the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments procedure.
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to identify topics and trends in relation to complaints; identify areas of organisational learning that have taken place over the past year as a result of the complaints received and make further recommendations based on trend data to improve services.
- 1.3 The report also highlights those areas of good practice within the Council and seeks to identify themes and trends in relation to comments made by members of the public so that the Council can also take action where appropriate to improve services
- 1.4 The report explains that the persistent complainant policy has been revised to align more closely with the Ombudsman's guidance, following feedback from the Ombudsman's office on a case.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources to:

- Consider the draft Annual Complaints Report for 2020/21 (appendix A) and approve for publication on the Council's website.
- Note the revisions to the Council's Persistent Complainant policy (appendix B)

3. Background

- 3.1 The City Council has been recording information about complaints for the last 15 years and trend data is included in the report from 2018 onwards. In 2020/21 the Council received 791 complaints compared with 1145 in the previous year.
- 3.2 For context, the Council's Customer Service Centre received over 270,000 phone and electronic contacts, during 2020/21.
- 3.3 The majority of services saw a fall in the number of complaints this year, with only Environmental Services (Streets & Open Spaces and Environmental Health) seeing their totals increase. The reasons and responses are set out in the Head of Service commentaries in the report.
- 3.4 Like everything else, the number and nature of complaints received was impacted by Covid-19 and its impacts on the services provided by the Council. During the year, the Council supported the community Covid-19 response and delivered new or expanded functions such as administering multi-million pound business support grants or ensuring all homeless people were provided with accommodation. The year saw a number of services run at full capacity, while others ran at a reduced capacity. Cambridge Live for example were unable to run events, which was a key theme in last year's complaints totals.
- 3.5 Three complaints were upheld by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman from a total of 9 investigations. The number upheld is comparable to previous years. We will not know the final number of enquiries made to the Ombudsman until the [LGSCO's annual letter](#) to

the City Council is made available in mid-July. Once received, this will be published alongside the Annual Complaints Report online.

3.6 The report includes:

- A summary of complaints received, their trends and action taken
- Details of compliments and comments
- Complaints escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman
- Complaints relating to conduct of councillors

3.7 As well as complaints the Council also received 97 compliments and 5,414 positive comments about the Council's services and staff through the GovMetric system, out of a total of 9,909 comments received via this channel. A section on compliments is included in the report because in terms of providing a good service to residents, knowing where things are working well and are appreciated is as important as knowing where things are not working well.

3.8 Subject to approval by the Executive Councillor, officers will finalise and publish the report on the Council's website with hard copies being made available on request.

3.9 In June 2021, the Council received notification from the Ombudsman's office of a draft recommendation that the Council should Review its 'Unreasonable and Unreasonably Persistent Complainants' policy and consider whether it requires updating to ensure consistency with the Ombudsman's 'Guidance on managing unreasonable behaviour'. This was with regard to a complaint not covered in this report (as it was submitted to the Ombudsman after 1 April 2021).

3.10 Officers have reviewed the policy and have updated it to ensure greater consistency with the Ombudsman's guidance on the matter. The revised policy is attached at Appendix B.

4. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

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The time and resources spent on responding to complaints is a not insignificant cost to the Council. Our aim is to get things right first time as often as we can to reduce the cost of "failure demand".

(b) Staffing Implications

None

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

Analysis and action taken as a result of complaints has an important role to play in ensuring that our services are accessible to all those who wish or need to use them and, that as far as possible, we are able to respond flexibly to the differing needs of our citizens and visitors.

(d) Environmental Implications

None

(e) Procurement Implications

None

(f) Community Safety Implications

None

5. Consultation and communication considerations

The Annual Complaints Report will be published on the Council's website.

6. Background papers

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

- (a) LGSCO's Annual Letter to Cambridge City Council

7. Appendices

- (a) Draft Annual Complaints Report 2020/21

- (b) Revised Persistent Complainant Policy

8. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Tony Stead, Business and Development Manager, tel: 01223 - 457501, email: Tony.Stead@cambridge.gov.uk.



Cambridge City Council

Annual Complaints and Feedback Report 2020 - 21

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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 remains 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.

Cambridge City Council has a two 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 initial complaint or the way in which the complaint has been handled, and they wish for their complaint to be considered further.

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

Complaints to Cambridge City Council in 2020-21: summary

Total number of complaints received

In 2020-21, the total number of complaints received was 791, a reduction of 354 from the previous year's total of 1,145.

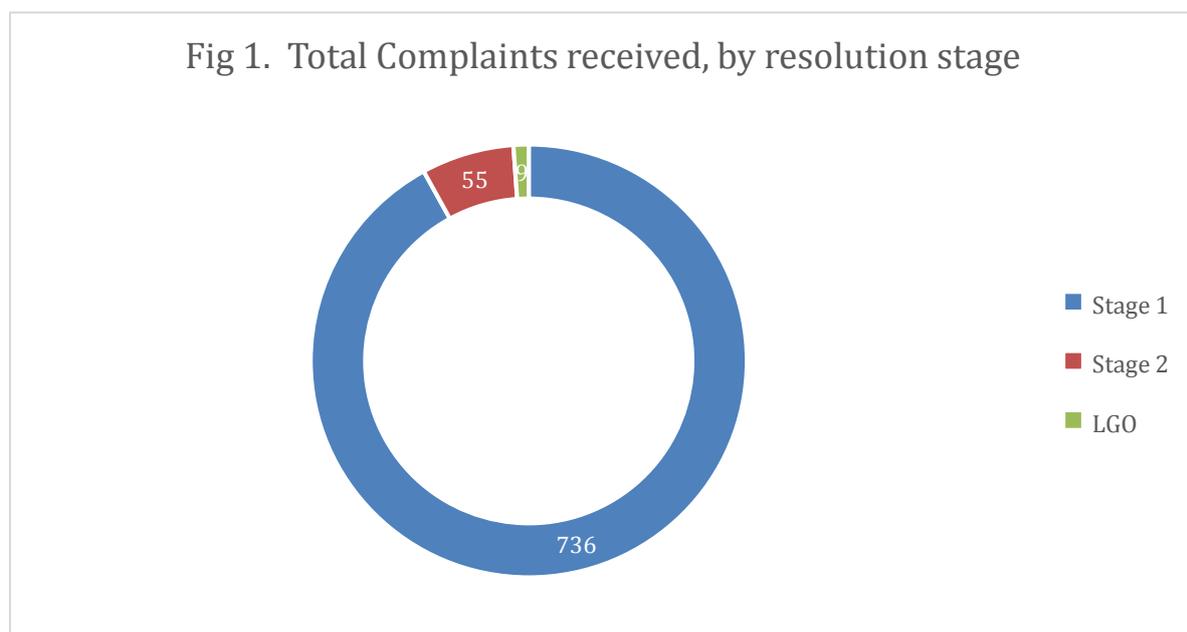
Proportion resolved at stage 1 and stage 2

Of those 791 complaints, 93% were resolved successfully at the first stage without need for escalation. This compares with 92% in 2019-20, and 89% in 2018-19.

55 complaints were escalated to stage two, which is 20 fewer than the 75 in the previous year. These complaints were mainly escalated due to the fact that the complainants did not feel their complaint had been fully resolved at stage 1. See Fig 1.

Proportion resolved within the target timescale

Across all complaints submitted, 85% were resolved within the target time of ten working days. This represents an improvement on recent years, where 81% were responded to within time in 2019-20, and 76% in 2018-19.



Overview of complaint trends

223 (28%) of all complaints received by the Council were for Waste Services. This represented a decrease of 175 from the 398 complaints received in 2019-20 which represented 35% of that year's total. As with previous years, the majority of these complaints were raised as a result of a missed bin. Despite having the highest amount of complaints in the year, the service also received a large amount of informal thanks and praise for continuing to deliver a good service throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic.

For the majority of council services, the number of complaints received decreased compared to the previous year. The only service that saw an increase in complaints was Environmental Services, covering Streets & Open Spaces and Environmental Health.

The Streets & Open Spaces increase was due to a single specific service issue in late December relating to the decision to close the Market temporarily on Covid-19 safety grounds. 55 complaints were submitted over two days as a result, and all of these complaints were responded to within the target time, with none escalating to further stages. Following the feedback, and taking account of further public health advice, the market was reopened in a phased approach beginning in late January.

The impact of Covid-19 restrictions

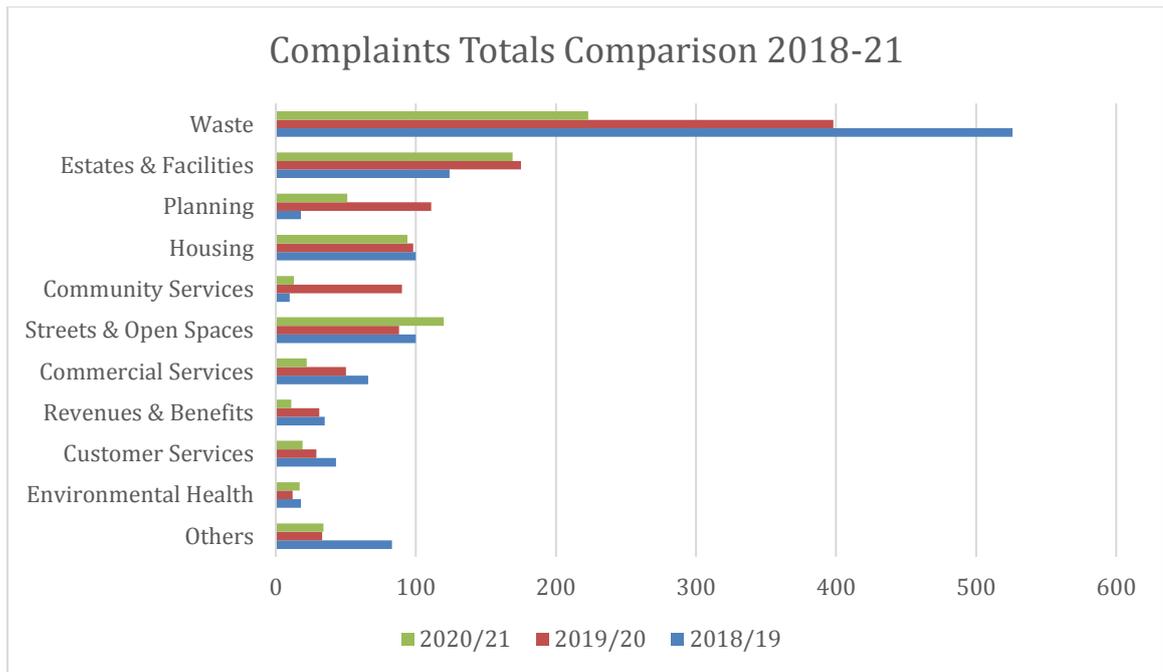
The Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly had an impact on the amount of feedback received as some services were only able to provide a limited service due to Covid-19 restrictions, or having staff redeployed to support the Covid-19 response.

Community Services saw a decline from 90 complaints in 2019-20 to 13 this year. This is likely because venues were shut and as such, no public events could take place in the Guildhall or the Corn Exchange, which is where a large amount of the previous years complaints originated from. This reduction brought the number of Community Services complaints total down to the level where it was prior to Cambridge Live being reintroduced into the service.

Customer Services had to close the doors to the Customer Service Centre due to covid restrictions, and as such could not offer a regular face to face service. However, the team did continue to offer a telephone and email service whilst working remotely and had staff available for emergency face to face appointments two days per week.

However, the reduction in complaints cannot solely be credited to covid or other external influences. Services have been working hard to make improvements in response to complaints and feedback in previous years and implementing new ways of working.

For example, the Streets & Open Spaces team are in the final stages of implementing a new digital management system across their street cleansing, enforcement and grounds maintenance services. This will allow customers to report issues via the online customer portal, and request services in real time, with the job being assigned to an operative on their hand set immediately, enabling a more streamlined customer journey, and improved customer service as it will allow customers to track the progress of issues they have reported.



Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

9 complaints were made to the Local Government Ombudsman. Of these, four were progressed to be investigated by the LGO, and of those, three were upheld. (See pages 37-39 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 has continued to review 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 need 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. This reporting has led to some constructive discussions with Senior Management, and as a result we have been able to take feedback and apply it across many areas of the complaints process.

Customer contacts with the City Council - overview & context

During 2020-21 over 270,000 telephone and electronic contacts were received by Advisors in the Customer Service Centre. The CSC only recorded 60 face to face appointments due to the centre only being open for emergency appointments. Around 52,000 contacts were handled by the Councils Interactive Voice Response system. Of these, over 20,000 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.

We also received 9,909 instances of feedback through GovMetric, our customer satisfaction rating system. See the section on GovMetric below for further detail.

Review of complaints process and improvement activity in 2019/20

The Business & Development team within Customer Services have continued to provide training and support to Officers within the Council, with a strong focus on Customer Service to ensure that a consistently good level of customer service is provided to the customer. Following feedback from Senior Management Team meetings, further training was also provided to Customer Services Advisors. These advisors are often the first point of contact for customers, and as such have the opportunity to resolve issues for potential complainants before a complaint is raised. The training focused on differentiating between a complaint and a service request, and how the advisors could think holistically to offer a resolution to the customer without the need to raise a complaint case.

How complaints were received

Year	Email & Web	Telephone	Face to Face	Letter
2020-21	93%	6%	0%	1%
2019-20	89%	8%	2%	1%
2018-19	80%	14%	4%	2%

The majority of complaints were received via a digital channel, predominantly via customers submitting their complaints themselves. 79% of complaints were logged by members of the public using the web form to report directly into the Council's Complaints Tracker, which is a further increase on 73% from last year.

The face to face customer service offering was reduced to an appointment only emergency service, which dramatically reduced footfall. No complaints were received in person from any of these appointments.

Compliments

In 2020-21 the Council received 97 compliments across all services via Complaints Tracker, which is a slight fall when compared to previous years. This could be due to the reduced service being provided due to covid restrictions, highlighted earlier. There were significantly fewer compliments left for Customer Services, as they are traditionally left via comment cards in the face to face service.

Estates & Facilities, Housing Services and Streets & Open Spaces received the highest number of compliments, with the majority relating to helpful staff members, and continuing to provide public services throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

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.

Whilst the Waste service saw a reduction 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 April 2020 in relation to continuing to provide a service, even though reduced, during Covid-19 lockdown. Due to the nature that these were received it was not possible to log them formally, however they have been reproduced on the sides of two of our collection vehicles



GovMetric - Customer Feedback System

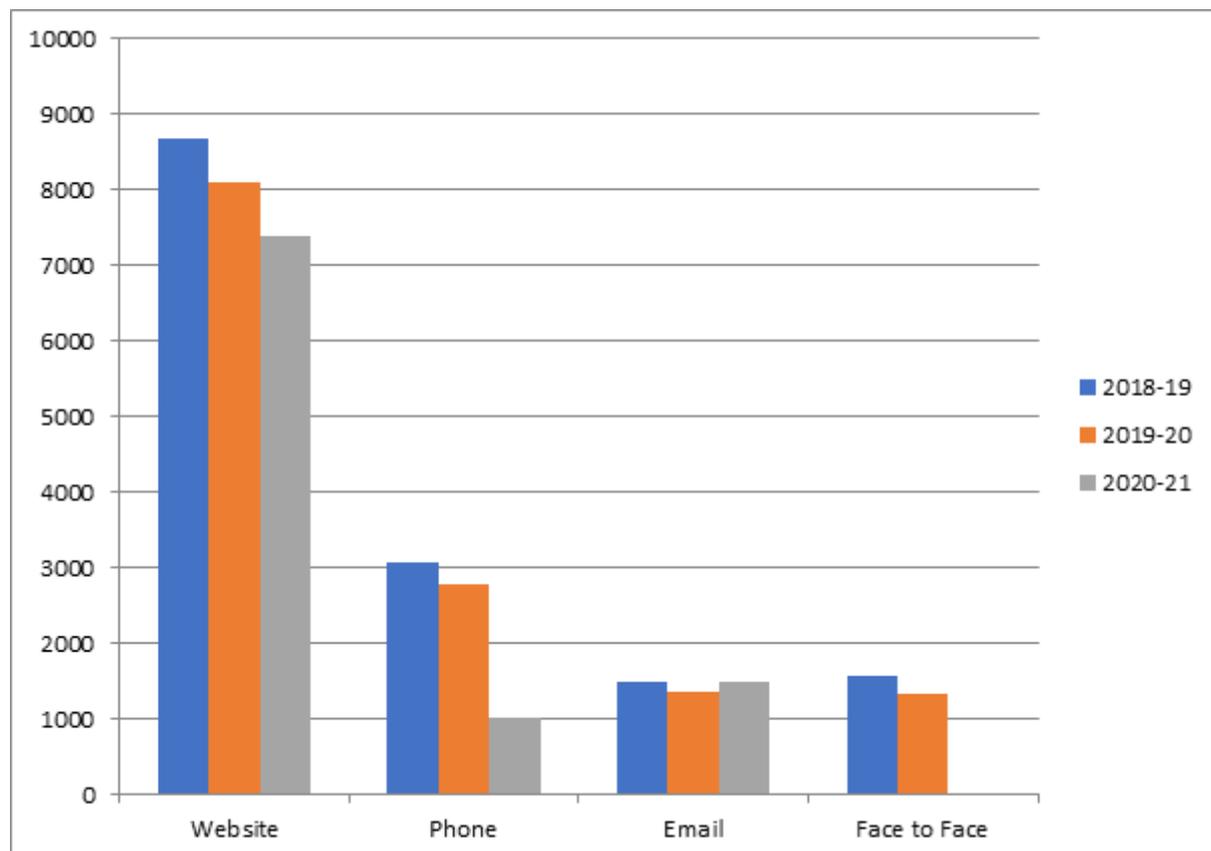
GovMetric was introduced by Customer Services as a way in which to gather customer feedback from a variety of different channels. This feedback tool allows us to review and track how customer feedback is submitted by the selection of three smiley faces: good, average or poor.

Once chosen their preferred smiley, the customer can then provide more specifics about their feedback, including service area and the opportunity to enter more details about their interaction with the council.

at the Customer Service Centre located at Mandela House, there is a Govmetric kiosk in the reception to allow customers to submit feedback, and emails and incoming telephone calls to the Customer Service Centre are also monitored using the Govmetric surveys.

Total Feedback via GovMetric 2018-2021

The graph below provides an overview of the feedback received by the communication channels in comparison to the past two years. The table on the following page provides more of a breakdown of these numbers and the percentages of good, average and poor feedback.



GovMetric feedback ratings by channel, 2018 – 2021

Channel	Date	Total	Good %	Average %	Poor %
Phone	2020-21	1026	92%	7%	2%
	2019-20	2775	89%	9%	2%
	2018-19	3067	88%	9%	3%
Face to Face	2020-21	4	25%	50%	25%
	2019-20	1345	77%	10%	13%
	2018-19	1572	81%	8%	11%
Email	2020-21	1481	57%	21%	22%
	2019-20	1369	61%	16%	22%
	2018-19	1482	49%	21%	30%
Web	2020-21	7398	49%	11%	40%
	2019-20	8104	45%	13%	42%
	2018-19	8674	35%	14%	51%

GovMetric Feedback received at the Customer Service Centre

Telephone feedback has decreased in volume by more than half this year, this is due to the decline in calls the Customer Service Centre received in response to Covid-19. Despite the total of calls received and the coronavirus pandemic, customers continued to be pleased with the service provided by the council with more phone feedback being “good” this year than in 2018 and 2019.

Customer Service managers continually monitor submitted feedback and create reports that automatically notify them of comments received from customers. These reports are used in monthly catch ups with advisors and are relied on as a training tool for the customer services team. Positive comments are sent to individual advisors notifying them on their excellent customer service skills, these are well received by the team.

The Customer Services reception was closed during 2020-21 due to Covid-19. However the number of feedback responses submitted via email increased which is in response to this closure as more customers were being contacted by advisors via email communications rather than in a face to face environment.

GovMetric Feedback received via the council’s website

Comments from Hayley Snelgrove, Web Team Manager

The web team check Govmetric comments, to see where we may need to make improvements to the website. From feedback, we make content improvements and fix any broken links that may not have been picked up elsewhere. We hope the upward trend in good feedback is a result of our ongoing efforts to make content easier to find and understand.

One example of an improvement following Govmetric feedback is that we updated our cookies functionality based on some customer comments about the ease of use of this, making it easier to get to from the cookie banner, and also improving the general accessibility of this function.

We had a spike in negative comments/feedback in March this year, which we have identified as probably caused by the council tax system not working for a few days (so people couldn't access their information) plus around this time there was also an issue with the bin calendar. When third party systems are not working, provided we are made aware by the service we will add a service update to the website, but customers will still often leave a negative report on that page.

Thanks to a colleague redeployed into the team this year we were able to liaise directly with services about feedback on their content, giving them the opportunity to make improvements.

As with previous years, negative feedback often is service related rather than relating to the website itself, e.g. notifying us about missed bins through this route. We do still also get comments about ease of contacting us.

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 can be 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.

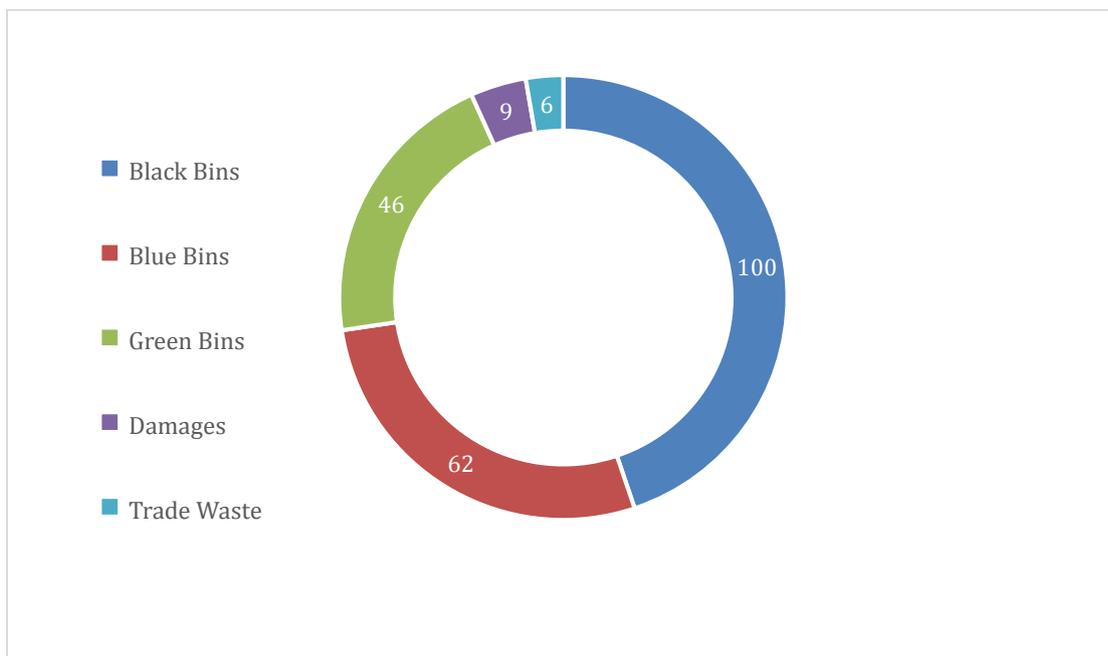
Complaints by sub-service are identified in the pie chart, this is how a service is broken down into the individual service request areas within. The bar graph displays resolution themes, or where these themes are too diffused and a trend cannot be identified, the bars will display root causes.

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).

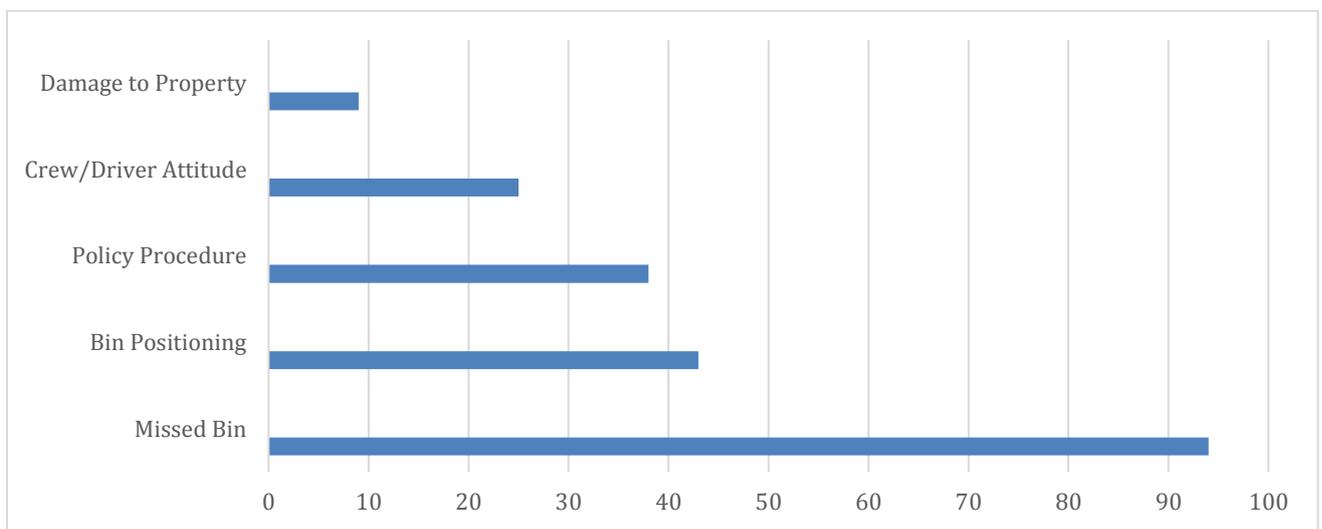
Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service

Waste	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2020-21	223	12	83%	1	4
2019-20	398	16	82%	9	13
2018-19	526	31	69%	14	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:

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 maintained the number of successful collections to over 99.84%.

In 2020-21, the service recorded 5383 bins that were not collected in the City on schedule for various reasons – at least 1778 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.

Of the 5383, 3,605 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, to 223 in 2020-21, this was achieved against the pressures of Covid-19 which lead to staff storages and service suspensions in April and May 2020.

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 83% of complaints within target and only 12 complaints being escalated.

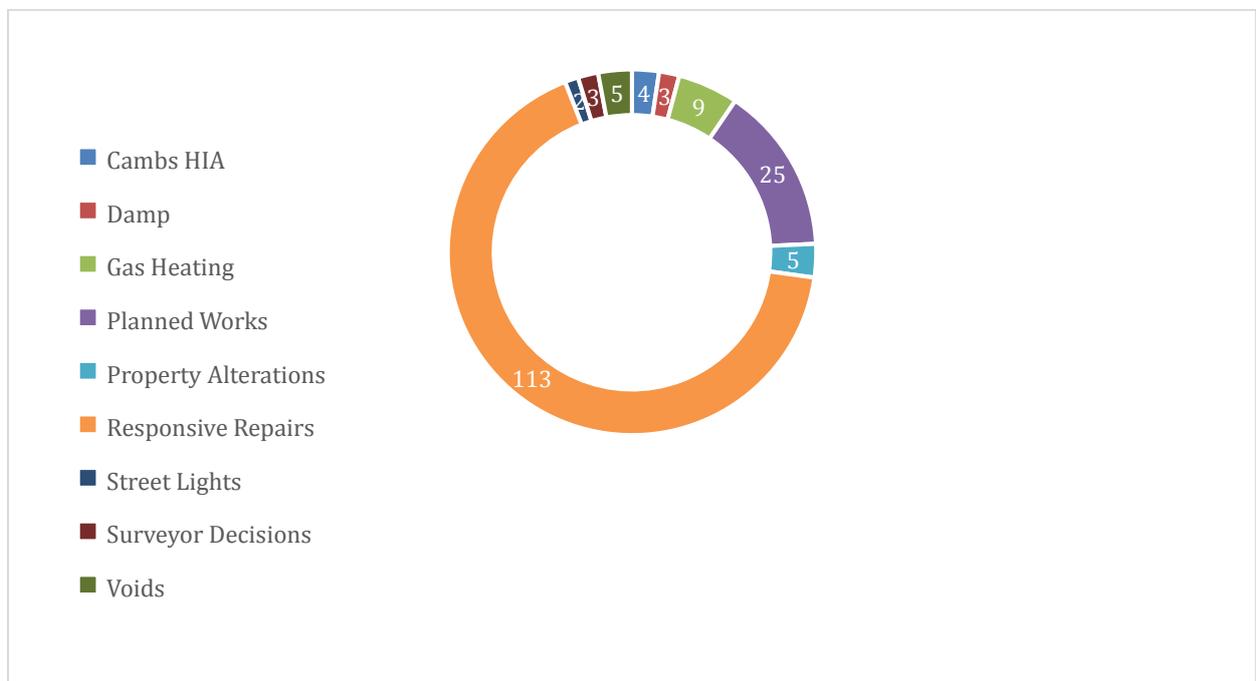
Whilst the service has seen a reduction of formal compliments this year, the service was pleased to see the number of informal thanks and praise received both in writing and directly to collection staff explode during April 2020 in relation to continuing to provide a service, even though reduced, during 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 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.

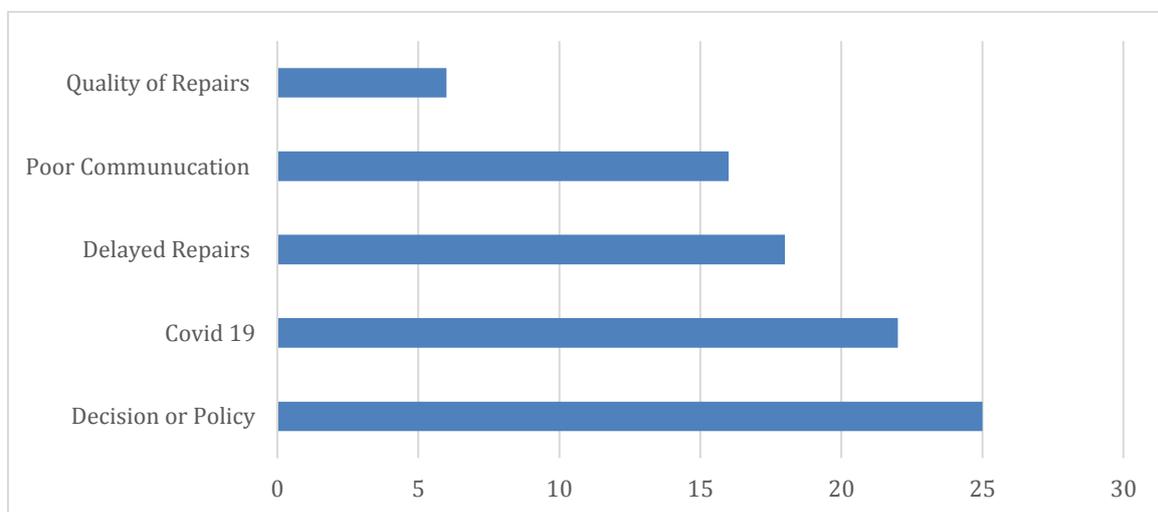
Housing Maintenance & Assets

Waste	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2020-21	169	12	86%	12	18
2019-20	175	14	95%	11	12
2018-19	124	8	58%	28	6

Housing Maintenance: Cases by sub-service



Housing Maintenance: Resolution Theme



Housing Assets & Maintenance - Service Comments

From Lynn Thomas, Head of Service:

During the 2020/21 financial year the service was affected by the impact of Covid-19 as you would expect. The volume of work we completed decreased because of the restrictions that were in place for a large proportion of the year. However, we did still complete over 11,000 responsive repair jobs (compared to 16,000 last year) and £10.3m of planned capital and revenue work.

While the overall number of complaints received is only slightly down on last year, we did see a considerable reduction from the previous year in complaints related to delayed repairs and the quality of repairs, but then a large number of complaints relating to the impact the Covid-19 restrictions had on the service we were able to provide.

I indicated in last year's annual complaints report that we had carried out analysis of our complaints and the root causes, and that actions to improve these were built into action plans to improve the service as part of our service review. There has been a considerable reduction in the number of complaints that have been received for delayed repairs and the quality of repairs which we believe to be a direct result of this pro-active approach and the changes made through the service review.

The highest number of complaints were recorded as Covid-19 impact & decision/policy resolution themes. When staff are following policy, we are not always able to provide customers with an outcome that is to their satisfaction, this can therefore lead to complaints under this theme. However, we are analysing this type of complaint to see if there is a specific policy or common decision that leads to complaints being made and if there is anything that can be done differently to address it.

We believe the complaints recorded under the Covid-19 Impact theme are an indication of the customers frustration at the reduced service that we were able to offer during the government restrictions and changes to the level of repairs and planned works we were able to undertake during certain times in the past year. This is something that was out of our control and as we move through the pandemic, the impact in the coming year should reduce.

The volume of complaints about poor communication have remained the same. I identified last year that we were working on a communication and engagement strategy and believed that the implementation of the housing management system upgrade and new repairs appointment system would improve how we interact with our customers. These were introduced towards the end of the last financial year and we are yet to see the real benefit of these in reducing complaints about poor communication.

In addition to this we are in the middle of implementing the Self Appointing Repairs System (SARS). SARS will allow the tenant to order repairs and view the status of repairs on their own address and in a communal block (if applicable).

It gives our customer control for when they want to book an appointment slot at their convenience, they can review or book this information any time of day or night and we feel this will assist with improved communication.

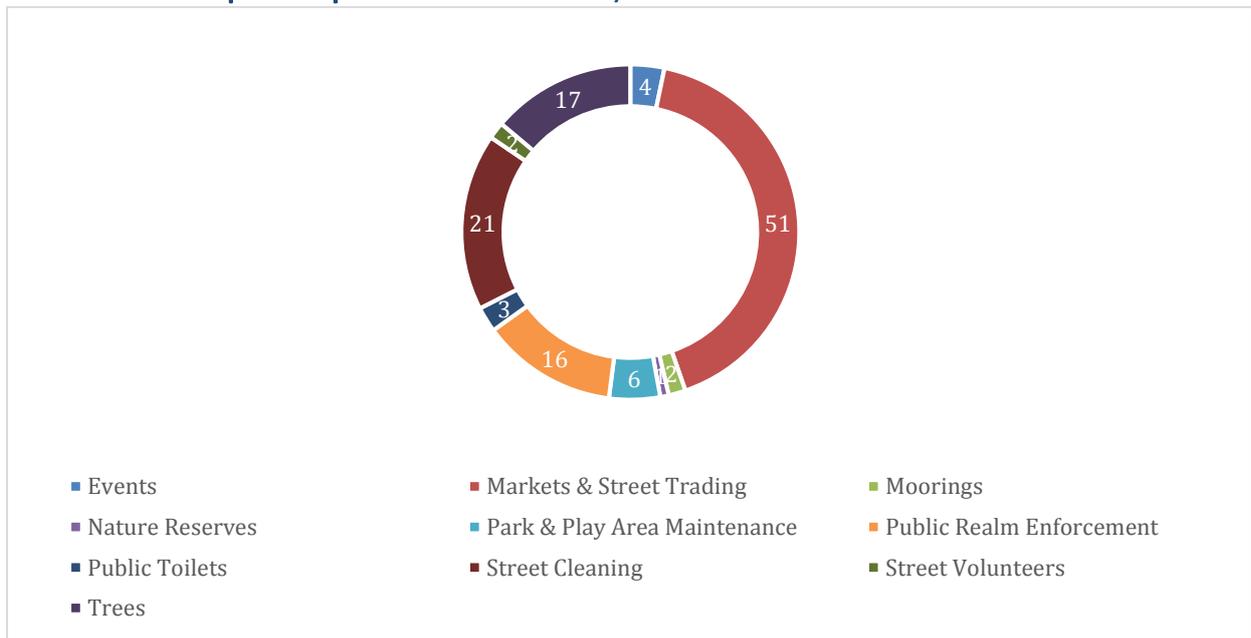
In the restructure of the service we introduced the role of Tenant Liaison Officer (TLO), we appointed to this role in January, one of the objectives of this role is to study the complaints made about poor communication and look for procedural improvement where possible. The TLO has started to complete email and telephone repair satisfaction surveys, although feedback is mostly positive, where an issue has been raised the TLO is making contact to resolve.

The TLO is carrying out analysis of those complaints that have been escalated to stage 2 to see what was done differently to resolve these at stage 2. The aim is to establish some practical learning that can be provided to those staff that deal with complaints at stage 1 to reduce escalation and resolve earlier for the customer.

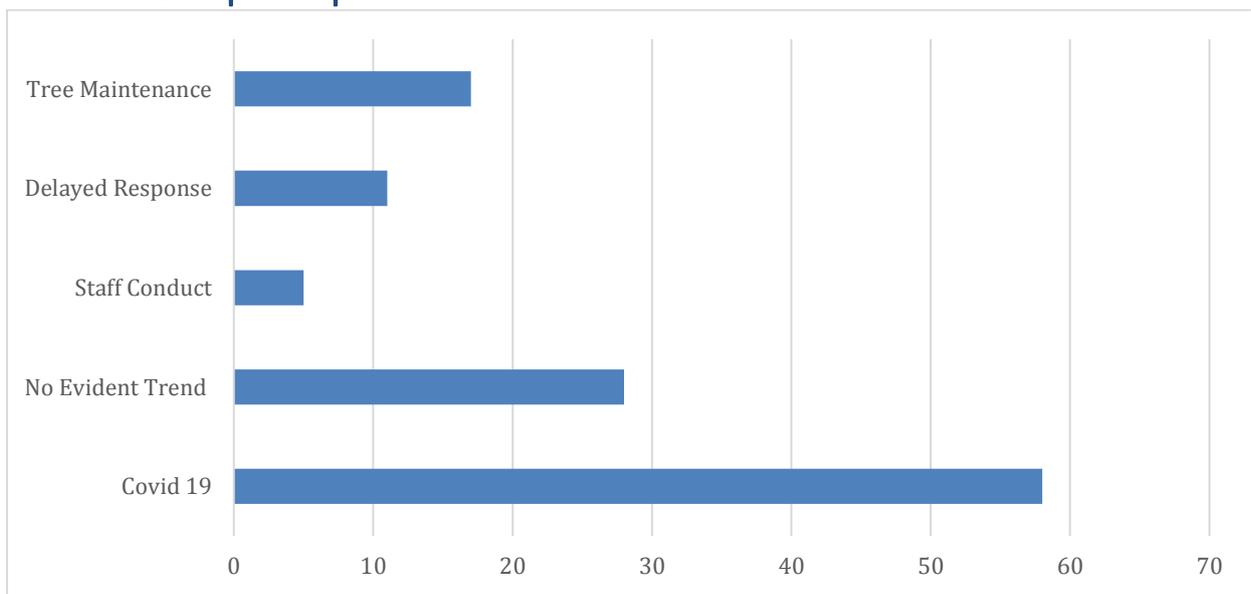
Environmental Services – Streets & Open Spaces

Streets & Open Spaces	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2020-21	120	3	85%	1	21
2019-20	88	6	76%	9	37
2018-19	100	2	59%	11	29

Streets & Open Spaces: Cases by sub-service



Streets & Open Spaces: Resolution Themes



Streets & Open Spaces - Service Comments

From Joel Carre, Head of Environmental Services:

Streets and Open Spaces (S&OS) service 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 cleansing, grounds maintenance and street enforcement services.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, our S&OS service has been able to maintain a near 'business as usual' operation, with exception of a few specific areas, such as public toilets, play areas and tennis courts, which, unfortunately, had to be closed for certain periods, in accordance with Government restrictions at the time.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen a significant increase in community use and enjoyment of our fantastic parks and open spaces for informal leisure and recreation. On the negative side, our Street Cleansing service has had to deal with high volumes of littering, especially from evening and night-time use of the main city parks, such as Jesus Green, and also significantly high volumes of predominantly domestic fly tipping across the city.

Our S&OS service received a total of 120 complaints (2019/20 - 88 cases). Of these 120 cases, the areas of service with the significantly highest case numbers were: Markets and Street Trading: 55 (2019-20 - 4 Street Cleansing (including Grounds Maintenance): 21 (2019/20 – 24); Trees: 17 (2019/20 – 4) and Street Enforcement: 16 (2019/20 – 16). The remaining areas of service complaint each accounted for 6 or less cases.

The service area with by far the single highest cases (55) was Markets and Street Trading. All 55 complaints relate to a single specific service issue, namely the emergency decision to temporarily close the city's outdoor market on Covid-19 safety grounds from 1st January 2021. All 55 complainants received a written response explaining how and why the decision was taken; and none were escalated to Stage 2. The market was re-opened on a phased basis from 18th January 2021, in accordance with the Government's lifting of 'lock down' restrictions and local Public Health approved risk assessments; and is now fully re-opened.

If we subtract, as 'exceptional', the 55 cases attributable to the closure of the market, the adjusted complaint figure for S&OS in 2020/21 is 65 cases, which is 23 less than the previous year (2019/20 – 88 cases).

It is also worth noting that the service significantly improved its 'Complaints in Target' response rate from 76% the previous year to 88% in 2020/21.

The area with the second highest cases (21 case) was Street Cleansing (including Grounds Maintenance). 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 the aforementioned service demands arising from the pandemic, this equates to fewer than one complaint per fortnight and there were no particular trends or causal themes.

The area with the third highest cases (17) was our Tree service, which is responsible for managing the Council's tree stock; and, on behalf of the County Council, the city's Highway trees – a total of c240,000 public trees. In 2020/21 the service responded to 752 tree service requests raised via dedicated tree webforms. This number does not include enquiries that came directly to officers, or via the Council's general enquiries form. The service also carried out 'tree surgery' management on 10,324 trees. Although the previous year, the service only received 4 complaints, an analysis of the 17 cases received in 2020/21 shows there were no particular trends or causal themes to report.

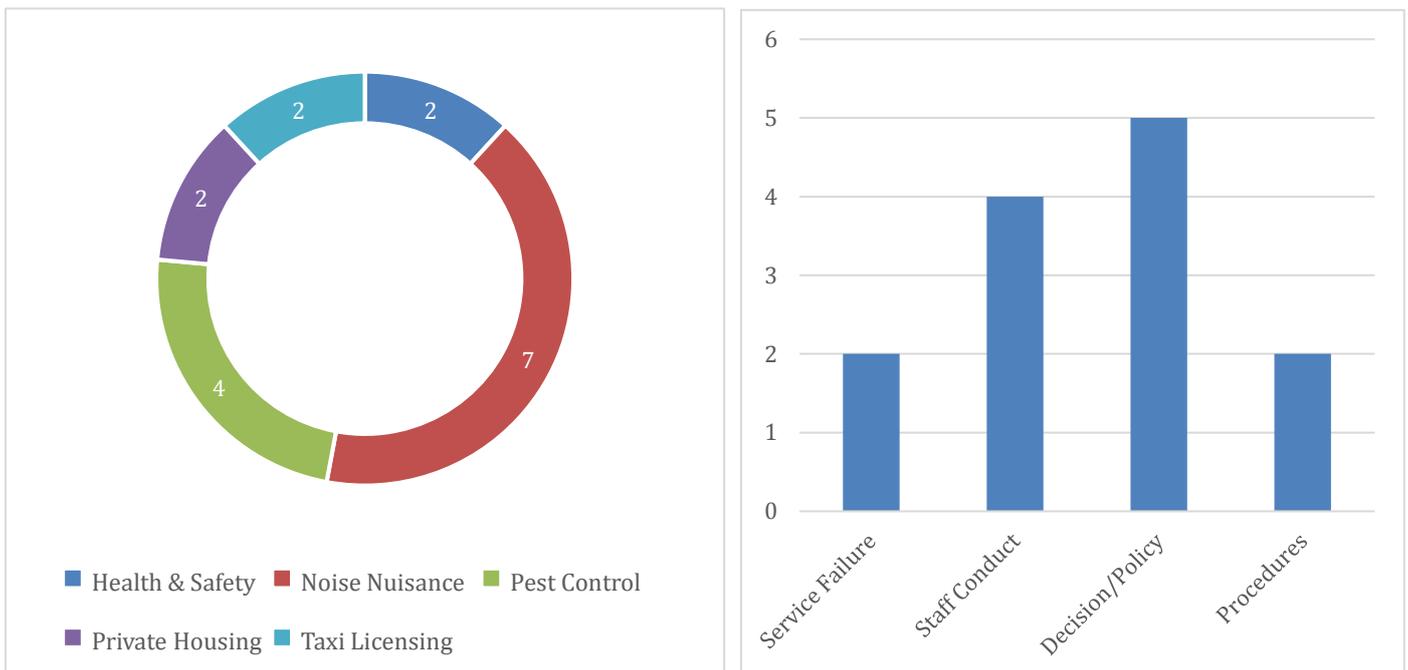
The area with the fourth highest cases (16) was Street Enforcement, which is responsible for investigating and taking enforcement action against environmental crime in the city, including littering, fly tipping and dog fouling. In 2020/21 the service undertook 1822 enforcement investigations (2019/20 - 2,266) and issued 235 fixed penalty notices (FPN) (2019/20 – 634), including 84 for littering (2019/20 - 371) and 151 for fly tipping (2019/20 – 72). The significant reduction in levels of FPNs issued, when compared with the previous year, is as a result of the Council adopting a policy of investigation and engagement, rather than enforcement (i.e.. issuing fines/ pursuing court cases) over much of the year, given the adverse impact of 'lock down' on households and businesses.

We are pleased to report that we are in the final stages of deployment of a new digital management system across Street Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance, Street Enforcement and Parks and Open Spaces services. This new system will enable frontline staff to receive and close service request and to report streets and open space maintenance issues in real time, using their handheld or in cab device; and for customers to also digitally report issues and view their resolution status in real time. These changes will transform how our frontline services work and enable us to deliver a better and more efficient customer service going forward.

Environmental Services – Environmental Health

Environmental Health	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2020-21	17	5	94%	8	2
2019-20	12	3	67%	2	2
2018-19	18	2	39%	4	1

Environmental Health: Cases by sub-service & Root Causes



Service comments from Joel Carre – Head of Environmental Services

Environmental Health (EH) service employs c40 staff and is responsible for taxi and premises licensing, food safety, health and safety and infectious disease control. The service also provides technical input to Planning on all aspects of EH, including air quality, noise and contamination. It also provides services to improve the private rented sector through education, enforcement, licensing of houses in multiple occupation and bringing empty homes back into use and energy efficiency. It also provides a pest control service.

Our EH team has led the Council's health response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including community test and trace, local outbreak management and public and business compliance with Government restrictions. The service has also worked closely with Cambs and Peterborough Public Health colleagues to coordinate and support the wider county's public health response to the pandemic, including sharing local community intelligence and providing mutual aid to deal with community outbreaks across the county.

The focus on managing the impact of the pandemic on the community and associated resource needs has meant that several core areas of service, such as private rented housing, commercial licensing and food safety, have been severely impacted, with little if any inspections able to take place. As the national lock down restrictions are lifted and the city moves into recovery, the EH service is expected to return to a near business as usual basis, subject to any ongoing Covid-19 management support needs.

The Environmental Health service received a total of 17 complaints in 2020/21, which is of the same order of magnitude as previous years (2019/20 - 12 cases; and 2018/19 - 18 cases). Of the 17 cases received in 2020/21, the service areas of service with the highest case numbers were: Noise Nuisance (7) and Pest Control (4). From an analysis of each of the associated cases, there is no particular trend or causal theme to report. The remaining areas of service complaint each accounted for 2 or less cases.

It is also worth noting that the service significantly improved its 'Complaints in Target' response rate from 67% the previous year to 94% in 2020/21.

In terms of the five complaints escalated to Stage 2 (2019/20 – 3 cases; 2018/19 – 2 cases), two related to pest control and one each to commercial noise, HMO and health and safety services.

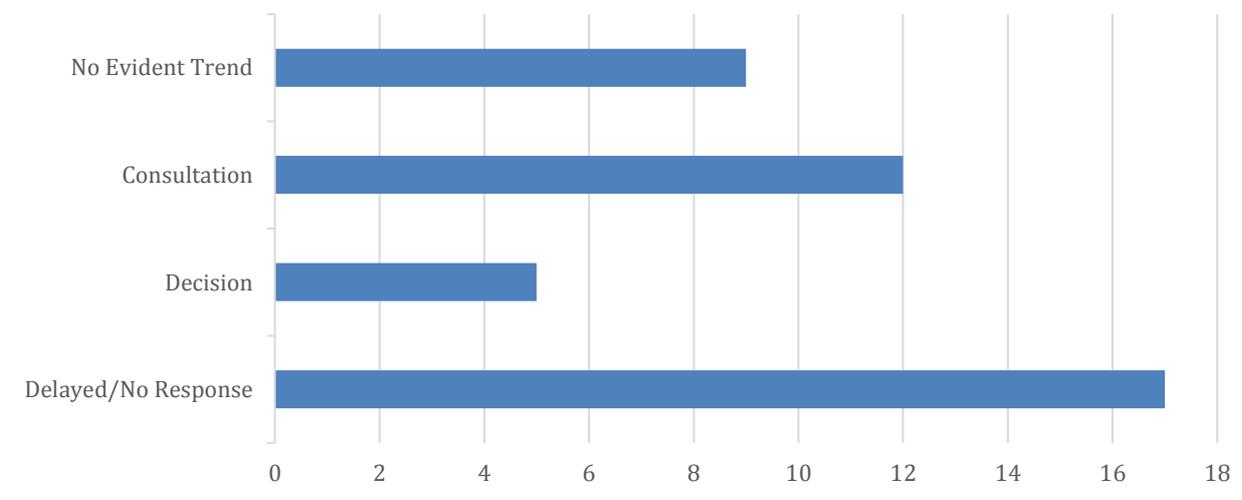
Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service

Planning Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2020-21	51	6	22%	-	-
2019-20	111	11	41%	2	-
2018-19	18	2	39%	4	1

Planning: Cases by sub-service



Planning: Resolution Themes



Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service - Service Comments

From Sharon Brown, Assistant Director

The performance data for the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS) for Cambridge City shows that there has been a significant reduction in the overall number of complaints received in the last 12 months—from 111 in 2019-20 to 51 or by 46%, in 2020-21. This includes a reduction in the number of Stage 2 complaints from 11 in 2019-20 to 6, or by 55% in 2020-21 and a reduction in the number of planning enforcement-related complaints from 15 in 2019-20 to 5 or by 33% in 2020-21.

The main focus of complaints remains the same as in 2019-20, with the majority being about the Development Management part of the service and the planning application process -42 out of a total of 51 or 82%. The main service complaints themes remain focused on delays and lack of communications but there has been a reduction in the number of complaints focused around decision processes -5 compared to 22 in 2019-20.

Whilst the significant overall reduction in the total number of complaints has to be seen against the wider context of the impacts of Covid 19, there has also been an increased focus on reduction of complaints within the service.

Improvements made to reduce complaints in the last 12 months include the introduction of a 24 hour call back process to head off formal complaints in relation to initial chasers about lack of communications and delays which are the main focus for the majority of GCSPS complaints. This has been successful but can be improved further. With a view to encouraging an increased self-service approach, a review of the GCSPS website has been undertaken and a range of updates provided to key pages including application processes and planning enforcement.

Further work is being progressed through a review of the generic planning mailbox/ looking at common themes in the E-Mails coming through and using these to provide more FAQ information on the website. In addition, the provision of automated updates through the Uniform system to applicants/agents at key stages of planning applications is being worked on. These should ensure that performance continues to improve in terms of reducing the number of complaints further.

Despite the above, there has been a significant reduction in the number of complaints responses provided in time compared to 2020-21, from 41% in 2019-20 to 22% in 2020-21. Factors impacting on this include the large number of vacant posts within the Development Management part of the service, particularly at principal and senior levels which meant that complaints were spread between a small number of managers during part of this period.

The service has addressed this by increasing the number of complaints investigators across the service; organising cover on complaints when individuals are on leave and by producing a set of standard template responses for common types of complaints to speed up the

response process. In addition, further updated website advice about the most appropriate mechanism to pursue different types of planning complaints has been provided -one of these updates relates to decision-making processes which is one of the themes where there has been a reduction in the number of related complaints.

The service carried out recruitment for senior planners at the start of the year which was partly successful and a further recruitment process for senior planners and planners will start at the end of May.

A planning service review process is due to start in May and the first phase of this will focus on the end to end planning application process and planning enforcement processes. Key objectives include improving customer responsiveness and speeding up the application process, particularly for householder applications.

Given that the majority of planning service complaints fall within the themes of delays and lack of communications, the outcomes of this process should also reduce the number of overall complaints further, as well as improving response times.

Customer Services

Customer Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2020-21	19	-	89%	6	10
2019-20	29	2	93%	8	29
2018-19	43	1	91%	38	58

Customer Services - Service comments

From Clarissa Norman, Customer Services Operations Manager

In 2020-2021 Customer services handled in excess of 270,000 contacts via telephone, email and face to face and received 19 complaints, a reduction of 10 from 2019-2020. Complaints continue to be very low in relation to the amount of contacts received, 0.00007%, and the reduction seen year on year is a positive trend for the team.

During 2020-2021 the Customer Service team supported the rapid and large scale changes the Council needed to adopt in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring the residents of Cambridge continued to have access to council services irrespective of the level of national restrictions in place. The service focussed on supporting customers to do things digitally while our reception services were closed as well as providing resource for other teams by carrying out service delivery activities outside the usual remit for customer service advisors.

Over and above the activities the service has carried out in response to the pandemic, in the past year Customer Services has worked with Environmental Services, Revenues and Benefits and Streets and Open Spaces and other services to progress the Digital Customer Service programme. A range of activities related to our own service review to improve customer experience and efficiencies have also been undertaken.

The collaborative working between services over the past year has resulted in the digitisation of a number of processes. An example of this is the joint working carried out in relation to the taxi licence renewal process which resulted in customers only needing to visit Council offices to collect their licence with proof of identification. Previously customers needed to attend a 40-minute appointment to complete the process.

Improvements and additions to the My Cambridge customer portal over the past year now mean that customers can access information about their council tax account, benefits claim and Housing rent account in one place.

Complaints in Customer Services were attributed to service failure; 26% (30% in 2019-20) staff conduct 26% (15% in 2019-2020) policy 21% (not recorded as a theme in 2019-20) and poor communication 16% (24% in 2019-20). 17 of the 19 complaints received were responded to within the target response time. The 2 complaints which received a delayed response were as a result of service pressures on the management team.

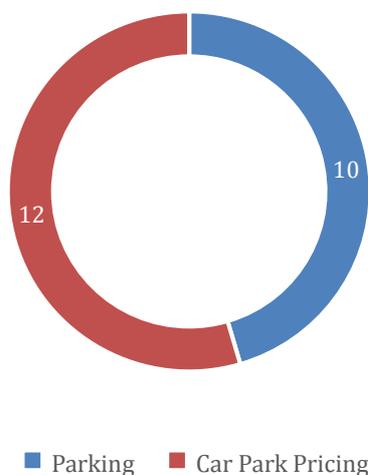
Working remotely with rapid and consistent changes in processes across multiple services, the team had multiple challenges to overcome. In response to the complaints received, Advisors received additional training to support the different pressures of working remotely and service/process changes and were re-briefed to the team. Specific issues were progressed with service areas to improve communications and limit the opportunity for repeat complaints. For example, a specific MS Teams channel for emergency repairs was set up to ensure these received appropriate levels of priority.

There were 10 recorded compliments in tracker over the past year, and 1,789 positive comments captured via Govmetric, considerably more than the number of complaints raised

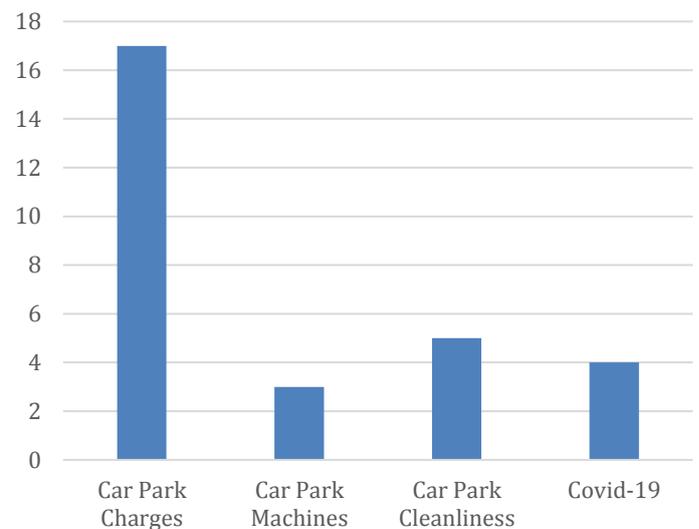
Commercial Services

Commercial Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2020-21	22	5	100%	1	1
2019-20	50	2	41%	-	5
2018-19	66	7	99%	4	4

Cases by Sub-Service



Resolution Theme



Commercial Services – Service Comments

From James Elms, Head of Commercial Services

This last year has seen a continuing of the year on year improvement as the service focuses on the customer, driving down complaints.

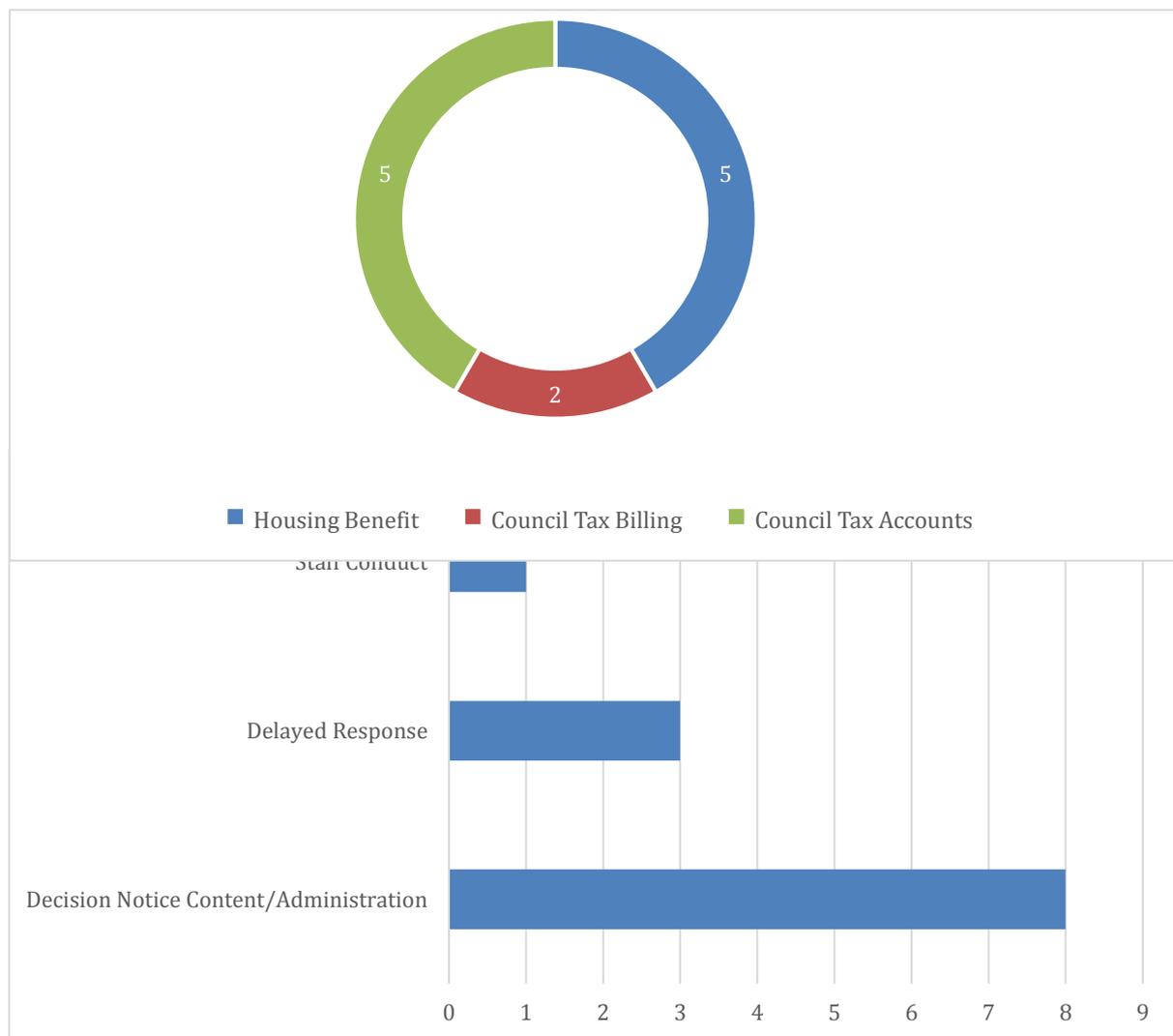
It is worthy of note that bereavement, fleet and procurement, all of which remained fully operational and much busier than previous years, have had no complaints over the last twelve months.

Parking complaints have been focused on pricing or lost tickets neither of which raise a service standard or quality concern.

Revenues & Benefits

Revenues & Benefits	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2020-21	12	1	100%	-	26
2019-20	31	4	100%	2	18
2018-19	35	1	97%	13	15

Revenues & Benefits: Cases by Sub-Service



Revenues & Benefits – Service Comments

From Naomi Armstrong, Benefits Team Leader

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 2020/21, the Revenues and Benefit teams sent out approximately 250,000 documents in total. This included council tax bills, payment reminders, final notices & summons, Business Rates documents, Benefits decision notices, and Housing Benefit overpayment letters seeking recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit.

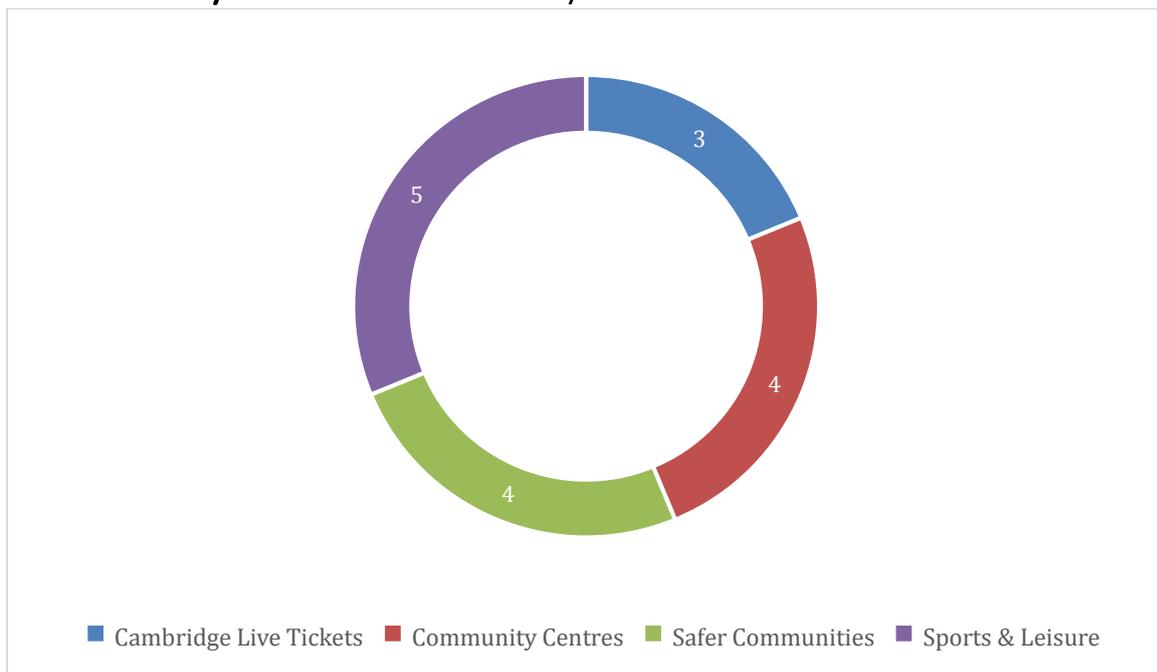
There has been a further reduction compared to previous years complaints totals. The biggest reduction was in Decision Notice Content and Administration and the team have continued to review the content of communications and to look at other ways of communicating including e-billing and the use of online self-service portals.

For complaints to reduce so significantly during the coronavirus pandemic when more residents and businesses needed support is testament to the lessons learned from previous complaints and comments and the continual review of processes that the teams undertake.

Community Services

Community Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2020-21	16	3	81%	1	9
2019-20	90	4	89%	4	15
2018-19	10	1	50%	8	10

Community Services: Cases by Sub-Service



Community Services: Resolution Themes



Community Services - Service comments

From Debbie Kaye, Head of Community Services

In 2020-21 the Community Services team led the Council's community Covid-19 response, linking with the city's volunteers and partners to make sure those who needed support, received it, also supporting local outbreak management and prevention work, and the vaccination programme. A number of our services such as community centres, cultural activity and leisure facilities were suspended, resulting in far less scope for complaints or compliments. Many staff were redeployed to activities such as keeping the city centre safe, and food security. Others worked to mitigate the economic impact of Covid-19 on services by successfully sourcing significant Government funding, supporting furloughed staff, and arranging phased opening where permitted.

One area to note though is Anti-Social behaviour - the number of complaints about ASB were above normal levels in the first lockdown, when families were confined to homes, also the Government suspended evictions.

A number of the complaints submitted under Community Services relate in some way to community safety anti-social behaviour. We sometimes first receive service requests of ASB through the complaints system, suggesting that the process is not clear for the public and that it hasn't been made clear that this process is for complaints about service delivery. Community Safety web pages have detailed instructions on how to report ASB but this isn't always picked up.

Actual complaints about the service delivery are generally because people do not like/agree with the outcome of the ASB investigation or have not understood the legal requirements for a court hearing, although this will have been explained during the course of the investigation. There were changes within Sports & Leisure who work in partnership with a third party contractor, GLL. GLL runs sports and leisure activities on behalf of local authorities, and in 2020 changed the way in which bookings were made. Moving to website and app based bookings was a big change for customers and did mean that some users were unable to access the system to book due to password reset problems. Due to this change, the number of complaints GLL received was considerably higher than usual, but it must be noted that many compliments were received from those expressing how easy and convenient it was to now book sessions online.

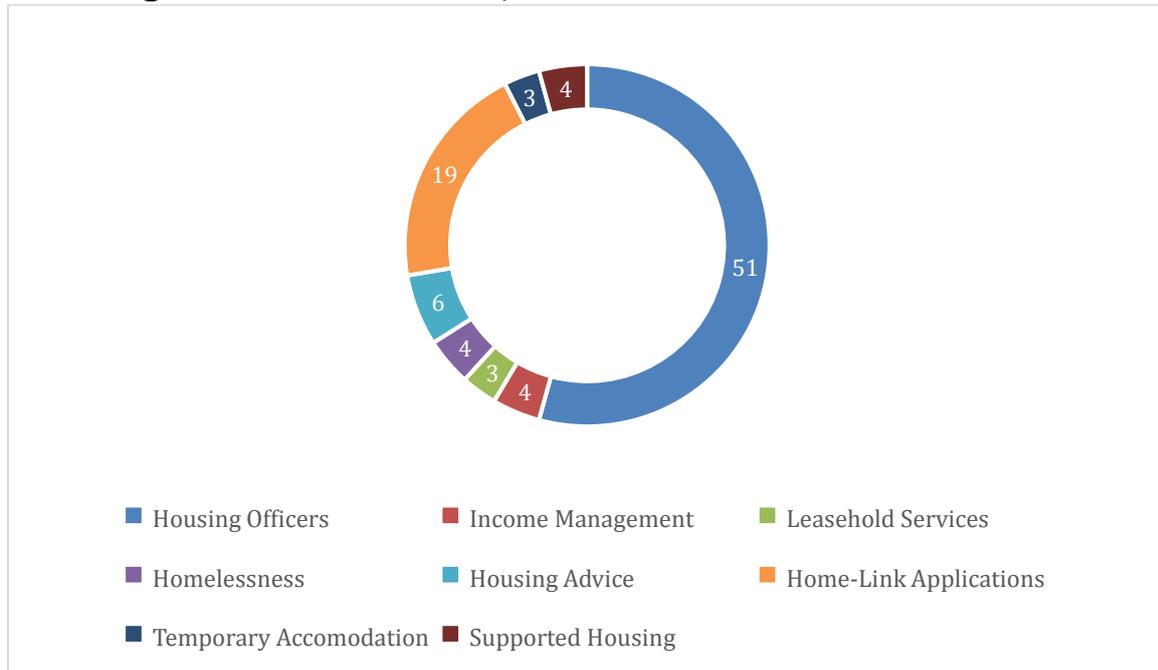
Due to the move to a digital booking system, the service did find that classes were being booked quickly (particularly because of the lower class numbers to ensure social distancing) this caused a spike in complaints received. However due to changes implemented to enforce Covid-19 procedures, this was expected by the service and several cases were received were about customers not wishing to adhere to Covid-19 procedures that were put in place, as well as users being unable to speak to the customer services team via phone.

Despite all of the mentioned changes that were put into effect by GLL, they had overwhelmingly positive responses from customers. These compliments touched on the friendliness and helpful demeanour of staff and the way in which the service had successfully opened it's sports and leisure sessions despite Covid-19, many praising the cleanliness of the facilities and appreciation for making the sessions available for all to enjoy once again.

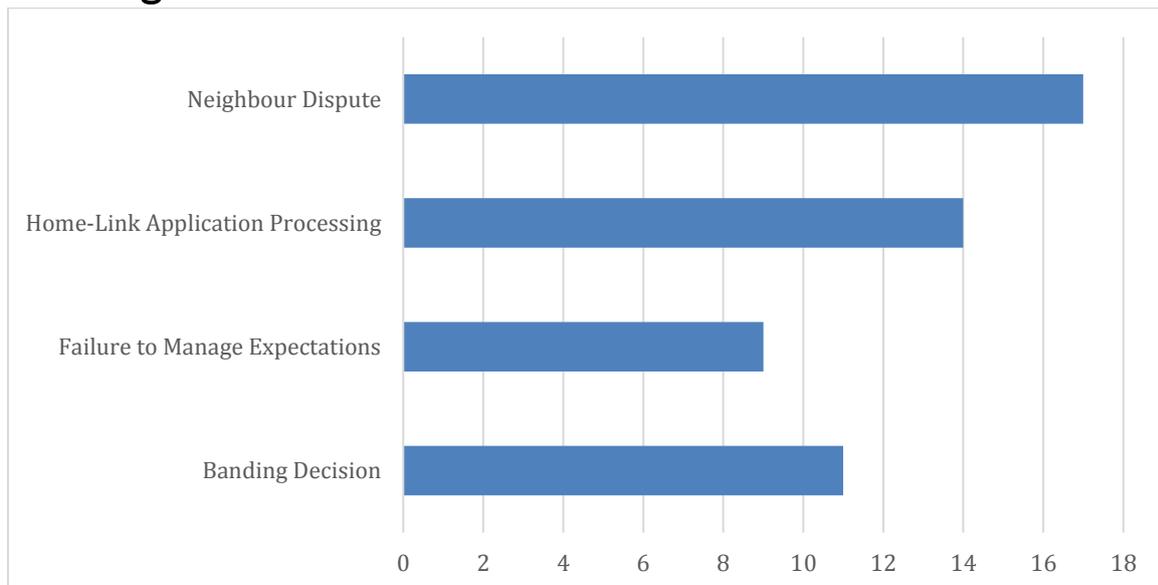
Housing Services

Housing Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	ICI Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2020-21	94	10		83%	18	29
2019-20	98	10	4	85%	14	29
2018-19	100	16	4	75%	32	21

Housing 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 216 residents into temporary accommodation during the year. We have also handled 823 homeless applications, had 2134 new applicants join the Home-Link register, and opened 1154 housing advice cases in the year. Given these numbers, the amount of complaints raised is low in comparison.

In 2020-21 Housing Services has been involved in the response to the pandemic in a number of ways; supporting the Government's *Everyone In* programme – designed to get all rough sleepers off the streets, housing officers supporting the Council's community response service and finding alternative ways to support or older and more vulnerable customers via our Independent Living and Tenancy Sustainment services.

For City Homes

The top 2 complaint themes during 20/21 were as follows:

- 'neighbour dispute – behaviour' (25.5%)
- 'failure to manage customer expectation' (17.6%)

To improve our response to neighbour dispute (behaviour), City Homes has met with the Resident Representatives Panel to explore alternative resolution routes such as the Neighbourhood Resolution Scheme. Feedback from the panel indicates that they would also find it useful to have more information about their rights and responsibilities as tenants. As an outcome, the policies that set out CCC's position are due to be made available online shortly. We are also creating new procedures in response to neighbour dispute complaints.

To improve our response to managing customer expectations, City Homes have reviewed each complaint individually to identify areas where we could have improved our response. As an outcome we have:

- Clarified the Home Loss payment process and shared this with staff
- Worked with Customer Services to make sure that the process for referring service users onto the Housing Team is followed correctly
- Been clear to return complaints to triage when a Service Request has been incorrectly submitted as a complaint (significantly reducing 'service request – not a complaint' from 22.2% to 2.5%)

In addition to the initiatives mentioned, City Homes has also responded to the Ombudsman recommendations, and in 20/21 it published the Sensitive Lets Assessment Procedure, Assessment Form and Flowchart to help staff effectively manage the sensitive lets process across City Homes and Housing Advice. We have also put in a lot of work to tighten up our tenancy management processes and procedures, to ensure that staff are given clear guidelines within which to work.

For Housing Advice Services

The most prevalent complaints centre around **housing application processing and banding decisions**. In 2021-22 Housing Services will be reviewing housing application verification processes as current waiting times for applicants waiting to join the register are far too long.

Overall

Across Housing Services there are some common themes around communications with customers (this links to the managing customer expectations theme above) and not always getting it right first time, leading to failure demand (for example, the customer having to come back to seek clarity following a communication from us). We are working closely on this with the Transformation Team as part of the Customer Services Review process

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 three stage one complaints which were all resolved within target.

Corporate Strategy

There were two complaints related to Corporate Strategy received. One each for Democratic Services and Strategy & Partnerships. Both were resolved within target.

Legal Services

Legal Services received two stage one complaints, neither of which were resolved within target.

3C ICT

One complaint was received relating to Information Governance at stage one. It was responded to within target time

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 one complaint which was escalated to stage. This case was resolved within target and related to payment on a building control application.

Multi-Service Complaints

Multi-Service Complaints	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target
2020-21	23	3	83%
2019-20	33	3	79%
2018-19	83	12	67%

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 further improvement in this measure, which is encouraging and highlights that the way of working implemented in 2018 has become effective.

There has been a reduction in the number of multi-service complaints. This is in line with the overall reduction in complaints.

The most common areas involved in multi-service complaints are Housing (18), and Estates & Facilities (12). 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. The majority of the multi-service complaints involved a Housing Service as complaints had often been raised to a Housing Officer initially, but they have had to involve other services to find a resolution for the complainant.

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.

Non-Cambridge City Council

In addition to cases received relating to City Council services, 70 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.

Last year, we added a paragraph of text guidance on the complaints web page in an effort to signpost the complainant to the correct authority first time, rather than submitting a case and then being signposted. This text addresses the most common Non-Cambridge City Council issues and where to register these complaints. The most common Non-CCC complaints relate to Highways, Bus services and Parking tickets.

This change has been effective as the number of Non-CCC complaints submitted have nearly halved, in a reduction from 131 to 70 when compared to 2019-20.

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 2020-21 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman received 9 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, 3 were upheld and the remaining case was not upheld.

The LGSCO were satisfied that 100% of their recommendations from 2020-21 cases were implemented by the Council.

Department	No of Complaints Received	Decision
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	1	<i>1 Not upheld</i>
Housing	2	2 Closed after initial enquiries
Planning & Development	5	3 Upheld 2 Closed after initial enquiries
Corporate & Other Services	1	1 Closed after initial enquiries
Total	9	3 Upheld

The information above relates to the number of complaints investigated by the LGSCO. The number of enquiries made to the Ombudsman will not be known by the Council until the Ombudsman sends the annual letter on July 21st.

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: 19 009 358 - 23/06/20

The complainant claimed that the Council did not respond effectively to their complaints about development near to their property. This includes a complaint that the Council should have ensured a different access road to the one used beside their property was used at an earlier stage. The complainant claims that the continual disturbance caused them an injustice. The complaint continued to say that the Council did not implement the recommendations in response to their previous complaint to the former Independent Complaints Investigator, and that the Council should not have granted permission for developers to use the road close to their property for access to the development.

The development in question and arrangements for access had been approved prior to the complainant moving to the area in May 2018. The works also started before the complainant moved in and caused a number of complaints relating to noise and disturbances from other residents. The Ombudsman found that the Council had been responsive to these complaints. The Council served two enforcement notices on the development in late 2018 which failed to control the noise. This led to the complainant beginning their case at Stage 1 of the City Complaints process.

The LGSCO recommended the following actions

- Send the complainant an apology for its failings in communication and failure to implement the recommendations from a previous complaint to the ICI.
- Pay the complainant £150 to acknowledge the time and trouble the complainant was caused by the Council's failure to communicate as promised.

Planning Services

Complaint: 19 004 621 - 29/07/20

The complaint claims that the Council granted planning permission for a development next to her home which has a significant impact on light coming into the property and affects outlook from her windows and garden. The complainant says the proposed development will also be overbearing as it is three storeys high in places, and that the lane outside their property will be narrower because of the development this will affect use of the parking space for the property.

The complainant says the Council has granted planning permission for the development even though it includes land which does not belong to the developer, and that the developer did not declare this when he applied for planning permission and so the application should be void. The complaint also mentions that the complainant has been harassed by a senior Council officer and the developer which has had a significant impact on her wellbeing and a significant impact on their son's health.

The Council accepted that there had been poor communication between its Officers and the complainant and addressed this in the second application submission. The point raised relating to being able to manoeuvre into the car parking spot was not addressed, but it is not something that would be taken into consideration when a planning application is submitted anyway, as the issue relates to land ownership.

The LGSCO did not recommend any actions after investigating this case.

Whilst they did find the Council at fault for how the initial application was dealt with, this was superseded by a further application, and a suitable remedy was found between the Council and the complainant. The LGSCO did not find any fault in the way that the second application was handled.

Planning Services

Complaint: 20 004 361 - 25/01/21

The complainant raised a complaint about how the Council dealt with a neighbour's plan to extend their property. The complainant believes that the Council gave flawed pre-application planning advice, issued a delegated report which did not address the complainant's objections to the extension, and did not take action when the neighbour began excavating their garden prior to receiving planning approval. The complainant believes they suffered financial loss, long term stress and went to significant time and trouble to resolve the issue.

When investigating the case, the LGSCO found that the Council failed to consider the impact that the development would have on land drainage. This is a consideration which was raised by the complainant in their objection to the planning application, and the report produced by the Council failed to address these concerns. The Ombudsman highlighted further issues relating to communication between the Council and complainants.

The LGSCO did not recommend any actions following the investigation of this case.

Whilst the LGSCO did find the Council at fault for the advice given and the communications with the complainant, they did not believe the complainant was caused an injustice.

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
2020-21	9	4	3
2019-29	13	3	2
2018-19	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, 2020/21

During 2020-21, the Council received nine complaints about the conduct of Councillors. One of these complaints was upheld but an informal resolution was possible with an apology from the Councillor concerned, 2 complainants did not proceed through the full process given particular circumstances and 6 complainants were dismissed.

There were three complaints in 2019-20 and two complaints in 2018/19.

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

Cambridge City Council Policy on ‘unreasonable’ and ‘unreasonably persistent’ complainants¹

Cambridge City Council values the feedback on our services that we receive through the complaints process and we are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high-quality service to those who make them.

There are, however, a small number of people who pursue their complaints in a way that can prevent proper investigation of their complaint or other people’s, or that requires us to commit significant and inappropriate levels of resource to investigating the complaint, or who refuse to accept the results of the investigation and determination of their complaint.

We refer to such complainants as ‘unreasonable’ or ‘unreasonably persistent’ complainants and, exceptionally, will take action to limit their contact with the City Council and its staff.

The decision to restrict access to the staff and offices of the City Council will be taken by the relevant Head of Service in consultation with their Director and will normally follow a prior warning to the complainant.

Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. They may include the following:

- Limiting the complainant to one means of contacting the Council (e.g. by letter)
- Requiring the complainant to communicate with only one named member of staff (this may involve re-routing emails to a named officer)
- Restricting the number and duration of telephone calls (e.g. one call per week of 20 minutes duration)
- Refusing to log, investigate or reply to further complaints about the same matter
- Where a decision on a complaint has already been made, providing the complainant with acknowledgements only of the receipt of letters, faxes, emails, or, if necessary, informing the complainant that any future correspondence which contains no new evidence, will be read by Head of Service and placed on file, but not acknowledged
- Referring the complainant to the Local Government Ombudsman’s Office

When we decide to treat someone as an ‘unreasonable’ or ‘unreasonably persistent complainant’, we will write to tell them why we believe this to be the case, what action we are taking and how long that action will last.

¹ This policy has been developed with reference to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s “[Guidance](#) on managing unreasonable complainant behaviour”. Officers should refer to this LGSCO guidance for further advice on how to take decisions and the factors to consider.

We will also advise them that they can appeal to the Monitoring Officer against the decision to invoke the policy and/or any particular restriction applied.

Managers in services likely to be contacted by the complainant, including the Customer Service Centre and Chief Executive's Office, will be informed of the limits applied.

If we are still treating someone as an unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainant after a year, the decision will be reviewed by the Council's Monitoring Officer, and a decision taken as to whether the restrictions should continue. Limits should be lifted and relationships returned to normal unless there are good grounds to extend them.

The complainant will be informed of the outcome of the review. If limits are to continue, the council will explain its reasons and state when the limits will next be reviewed.

New complaints on other matters from complainants who have come under the unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants policy will be treated on their merits.

Reviewed & updated June 2021