



Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report

1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014

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Introduction

This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2013/14 under the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the housing procedure). 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. The report also highlights any areas of good practice and seeks to identify topics and trends in relation to comments made by members of the public so that the Council can take action where appropriate to improve services.

In addition to the statistical information presented in this report it is important to recognise the work of the Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team that underpins this in terms of promoting an organisational culture in which complaints are recognised, accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. This also enables the Council to collect accurate information on complaints in order to identify topics and trends and improve services accordingly.

Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

The procedure sets out how the Council will deal with complaints, compliments and comments received about the Council as a social landlord (as well as in respect of its ownership and management of leasehold housing).

The procedure has three stages. Stage 1 is a local resolution stage where we try to resolve those complaints that cannot be resolved immediately as part of our day to day business. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with locally, that is within the service being complained about. We aim to resolve the majority of complaints at Stage 1 of the procedure.

Stage 2 is a formal investigation stage where complaints will usually be investigated by the Complaints and Information Governance Manager or another officer independent of the service being complained about.

Stage 3 is a mandatory stage between the Council and the Housing Ombudsman. This is referred to as the 'designated person' or 'democratic filter'. The designated person or democratic filter can be an MP, a local Councillor or a recognised Tenant Panel. This has to be decided locally and should be agreed as part of the Council's local offer with the Tenants' Board. In Darlington it was agreed with Jenni Chapman MP, Councillor Copeland, as the relevant portfolio holder, and the Tenants' Board that this function would be performed by a recognised Tenant Panel (from here onwards referred to as the Tenants' Complaints Panel).

Should a tenant remain dissatisfied with the Council's response to their complaint, they will be required to refer the matter to the Tenants' Complaints Panel. The Tenants' Complaints Panel may help resolve the complaint directly, refer the

complaint to the Housing Ombudsman or decide to do neither. If the Tenants' Complaints Panel decides not to take any action the complainant will be entitled to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman directly. The complainant will also be able to approach the Housing Ombudsman directly in cases where eight weeks have elapsed since the Council's response to their complaint at Stage 2 of the housing procedure.

Public Information and Accessibility

We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible we have produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.

Information is available on the Council's website which contains an electronic form people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.

The Complaints and Information Governance Manager can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Complaints Information and Organisational Learning

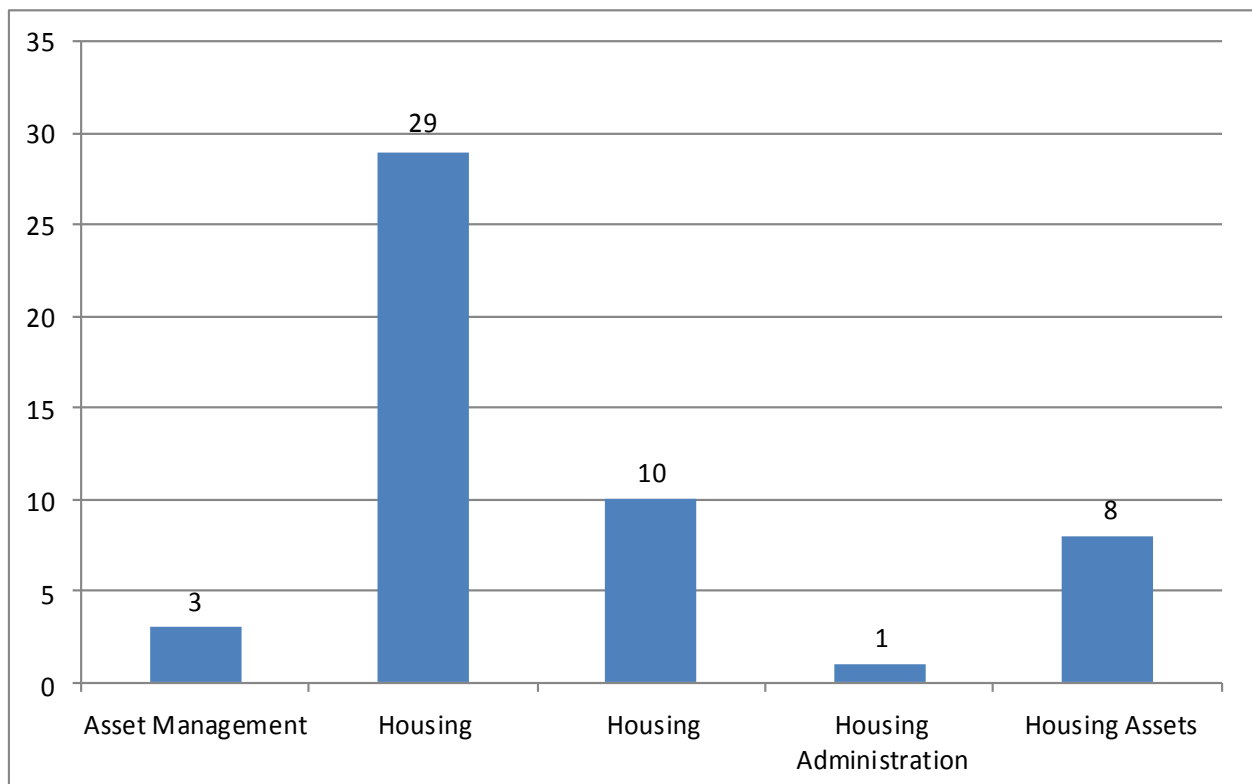
Overview of Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 the Council received a total of 101 complaints under the housing procedure; a similar number to that received under the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure, for Housing and Building Services, during 2012/13.

All of the compliments and comments received for Housing and Building Services during 2013/14 were recorded under the Corporate Procedure. *For further details see the Council's Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2013/14.*

A breakdown of the total number of complaints received by service area is provided below.

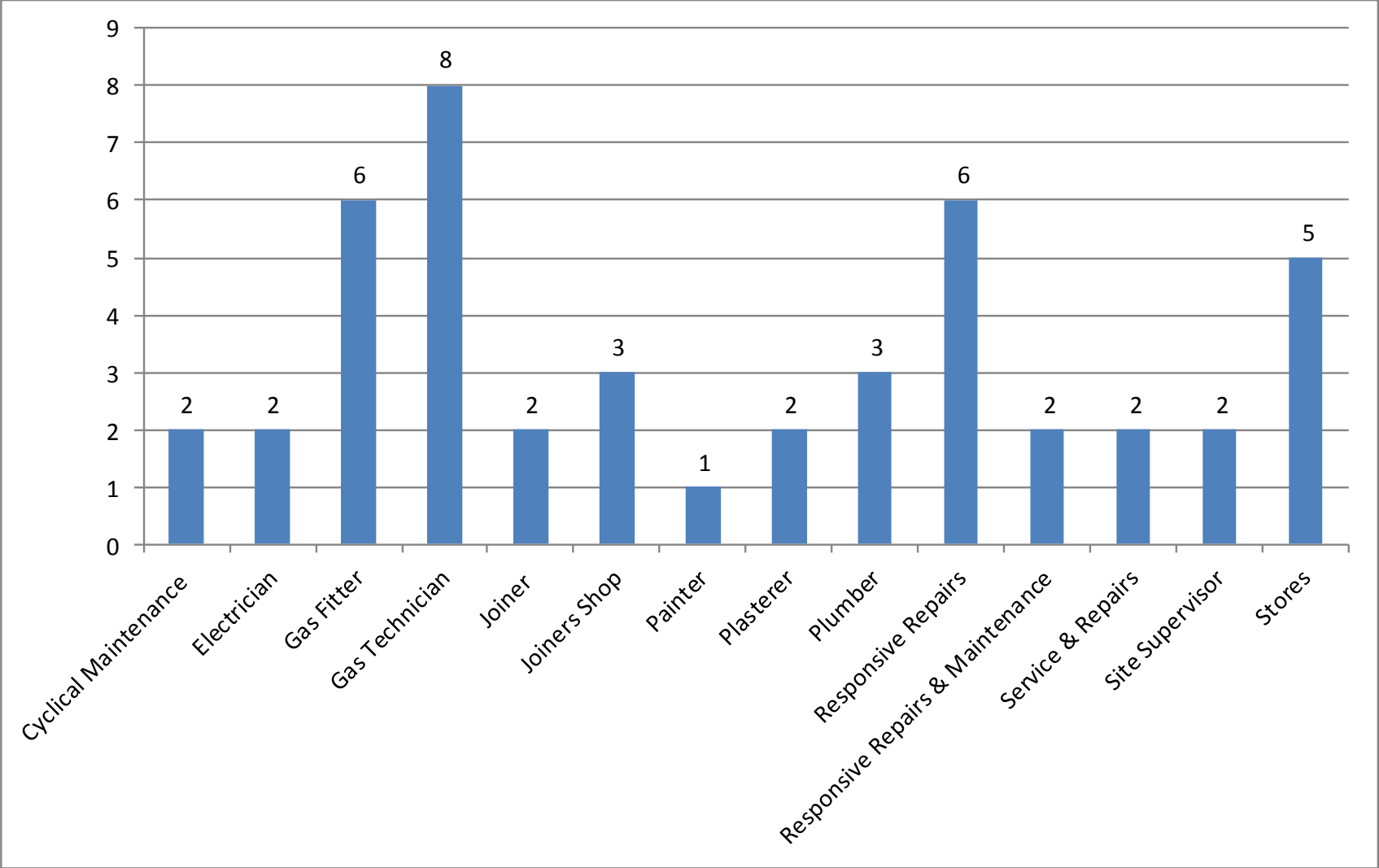
Housing & Building Services - Housing



NB. Some services may appear more than once as a result of changes to the Council's organisational structure during 2013/14.

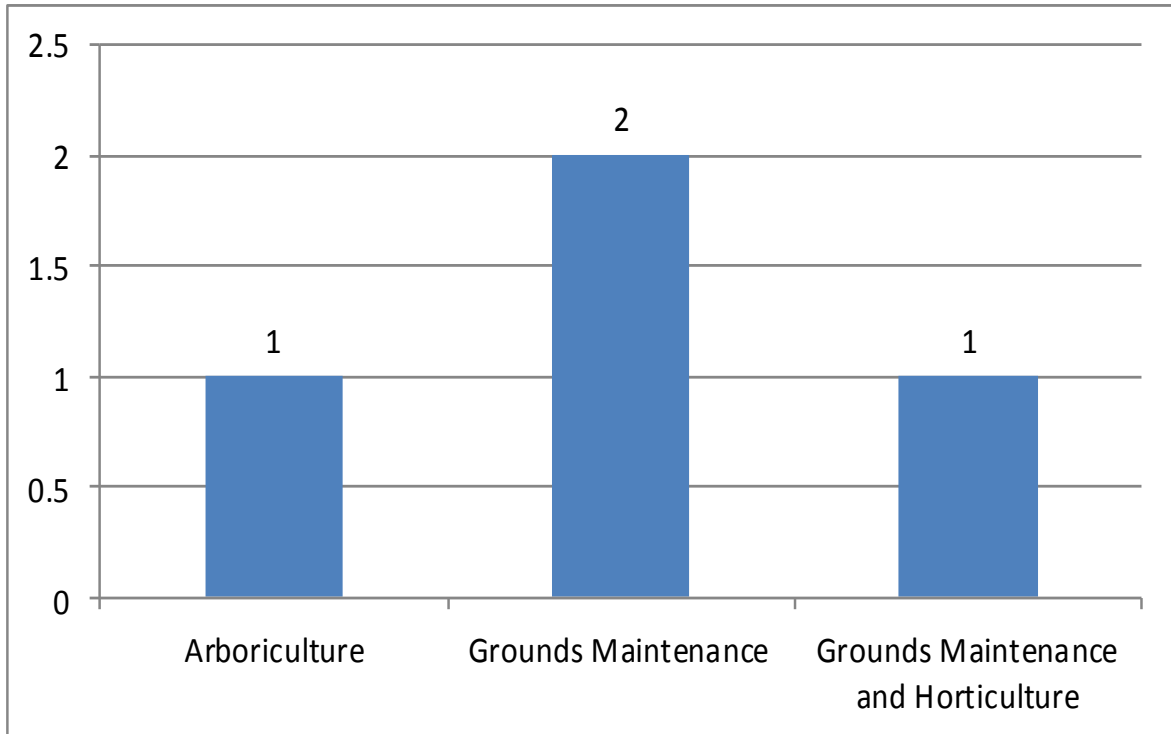
The most common cause of complaint was delays in arranging repairs.

Housing & Building Services – Building Services



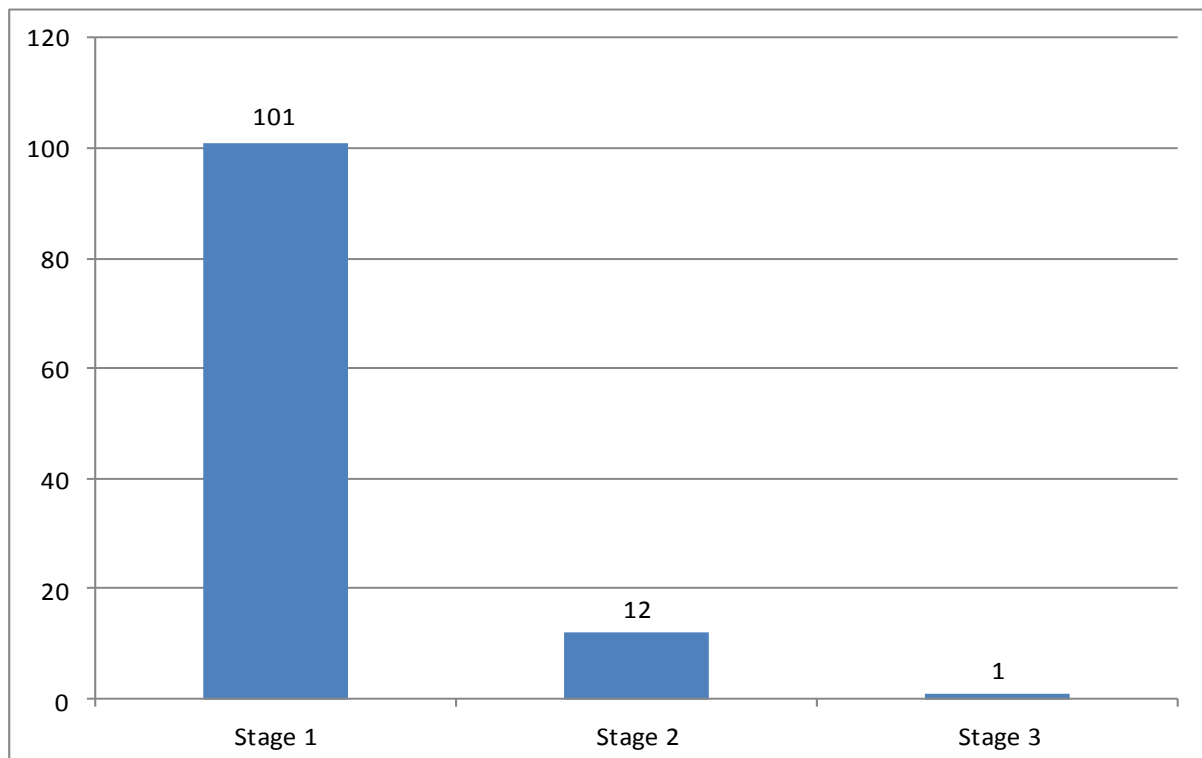
The most common cause of complaint remained delays in undertaking, the quality of and communication in relation to repair work. As a result of organisational learning the Council saw a significant reduction in the number of complaints received regarding boiler repairs compared to 2012/13.

Environmental Services – Street Scene



Complaints by Stage

The below graph shows the number of Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints received under the housing procedure during 2013/14.



Complaints by Outcome

The below tables show the decisions reached in relation to those complaints received during 2013/14.

Stage 1

Service Area/Team	Closed With No Response	Escalated to Stage 2 (No S1 Response)	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Neighbourhood Services & Resources	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housing & Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Responsive Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total for Responsive Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total for Building Services	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total for Housing & Building Services	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total for Neighbourhood Services & Resources	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Place	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Building Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cyclical Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Total for Cyclical Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Responsive Repairs	1	0	0	1	0	4	0	6
Total for Responsive Repairs	1	0	0	1	0	4	0	6
Total for Building Maintenance	1	0	0	1	0	6	0	8
Total for Building Services	1	0	0	1	0	6	0	8

Community Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Environmental Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Street Scene	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grounds Maintenance and Horticulture	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total for StreetScene	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
StreetScene	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arboriculture	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grounds Maintenance	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Total for StreetScene	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Total for Environmental Services	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Total for Community Services	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Housing & Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Joiners Shop	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
Total for Joiners Shop	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
Service and Repairs	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Electrician	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Gas Fitter	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	5
Gas Technician	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	6
Joiner	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Painter	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Plasterer	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Total for Service and Repairs	0	1	0	2	0	17	0	0	20
Site Supervisor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Plumber	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Total for Site Supervisor	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Stores	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	5
Total for Stores	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	5
Total for Building Services	0	1	0	4	0	25	0	0	30
Housing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housing	0	1	0	9	4	11	4	4	29
Total for Housing	0	1	0	9	4	11	4	4	29
Housing Assets	0	0	0	3	4	1	0	0	8

Total for Housing Assets	0	0	0	3	4	1	0	8
Total for Housing	0	1	0	12	8	12	4	37
Total for Housing & Building Services	0	2	0	16	8	37	4	67
Housing Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asset Management	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
Total for Asset Management	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
Housing	0	0	0	1	1	5	3	10
Total for Housing	0	0	0	1	1	5	3	10
Housing Administration	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total for Housing Administration	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total for Housing Services	0	0	1	1	2	7	3	14
Total	2	4	1	19	10	50	8	94

Stage 2

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	On hold	Partially Upheld	Suspended (ongoing proceedings)	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Place	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Environmental Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
StreetScene	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arboriculture	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grounds Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total for StreetScene	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Total for Environmental Services	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Total for Community Services	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Housing & Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Service and Repairs	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Gas Technician	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Plasterer	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Total for Service and Repairs	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	6
Total for Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	6
Housing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housing	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	3
Total for Housing	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	3
Housing Assets	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total for Housing Assets	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total for Housing	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	4
Total for Housing & Building Services	0	1	0	2	0	5	2	10
Total	1	1	0	2	0	6	2	12

Stage 3

The Tenants' Complaints Panel determined one complaint during 2013/14. The panel concluded that the Council had acted reasonably and fairly in considering the complaint. As the complainant remained dissatisfied, the Tenants' Complaints Panel referred the matter to the Housing Ombudsman.

Housing Ombudsman

One complaint was referred to the Housing Ombudsman in 2013/14. The Housing Ombudsman did not make any decisions in relation to complaints received during 2013/14.

Organisational Learning

All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, several service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2013/14. Some examples of these are detailed below.

Following a complaint for Housing Management refresher training was provided to Housing Officers regarding the void management process.

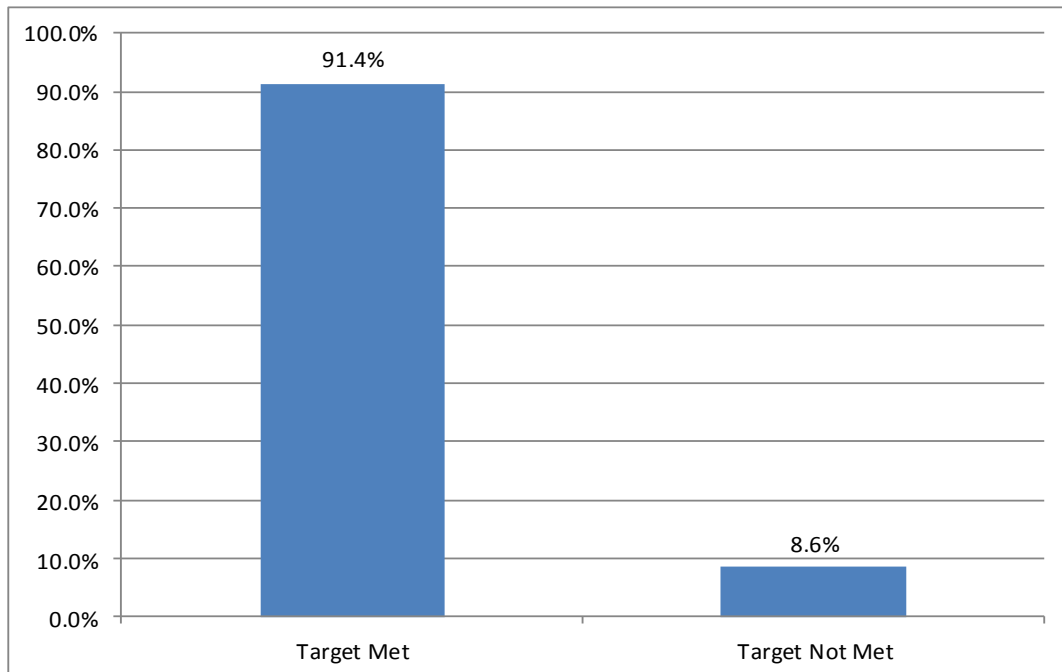
Following a complaint for the Gas Technician a system was put in place to ensure Housing Management Officers contact tenants in relation to repairs reported via the out of hours service rather than placing the onus on the tenant. It was also agreed that a qualified person would be made available for the individual answering the telephone on the out of hours service to consult prior to giving advice.

Following a complaint for Housing, about delays in organising boiler repair training was provided to Contact Centre staff in relation to the correct process to be followed.

Performance against the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

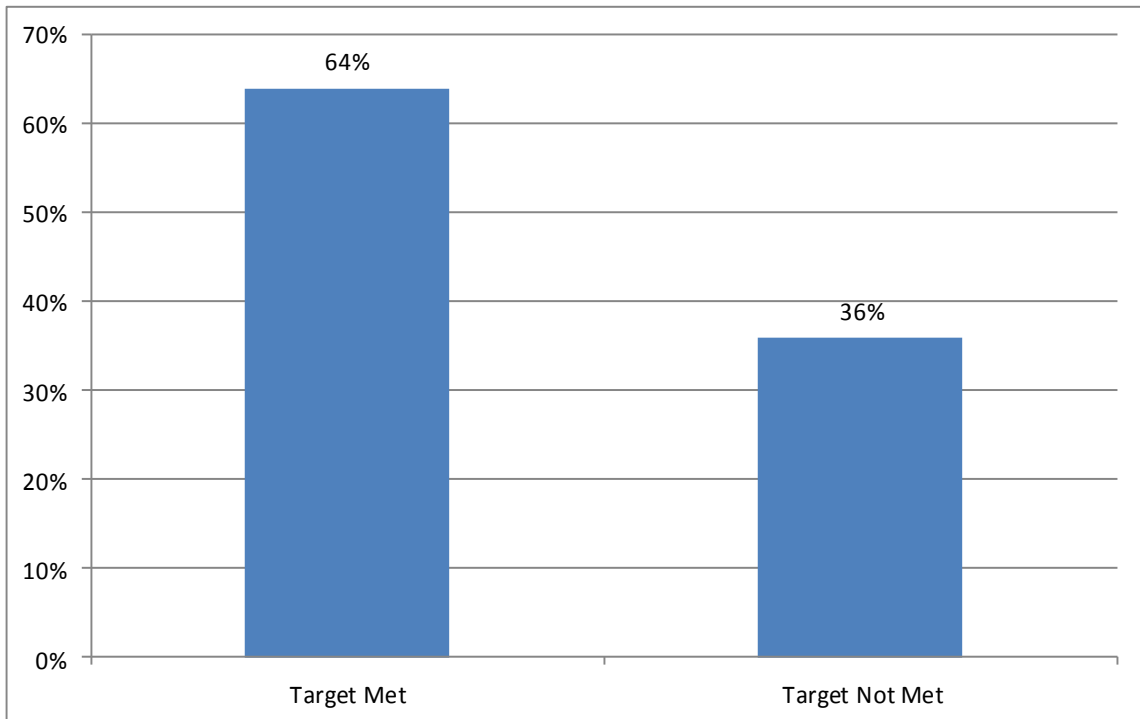
Stage 1

Performance against Stage 1 acknowledgement target (3 working days)



There is no comparable data from 2012/13. The most common reason that the Stage 1 acknowledgement target was not met was because the complaint was not forwarded to the CIG Team on the day of receipt. Information is provided in the procedure practice guidance on how officers can ensure complaints reach the CIG Team in time to be acknowledged and the CIG Team addresses the issue individually with officers each time it occurs.

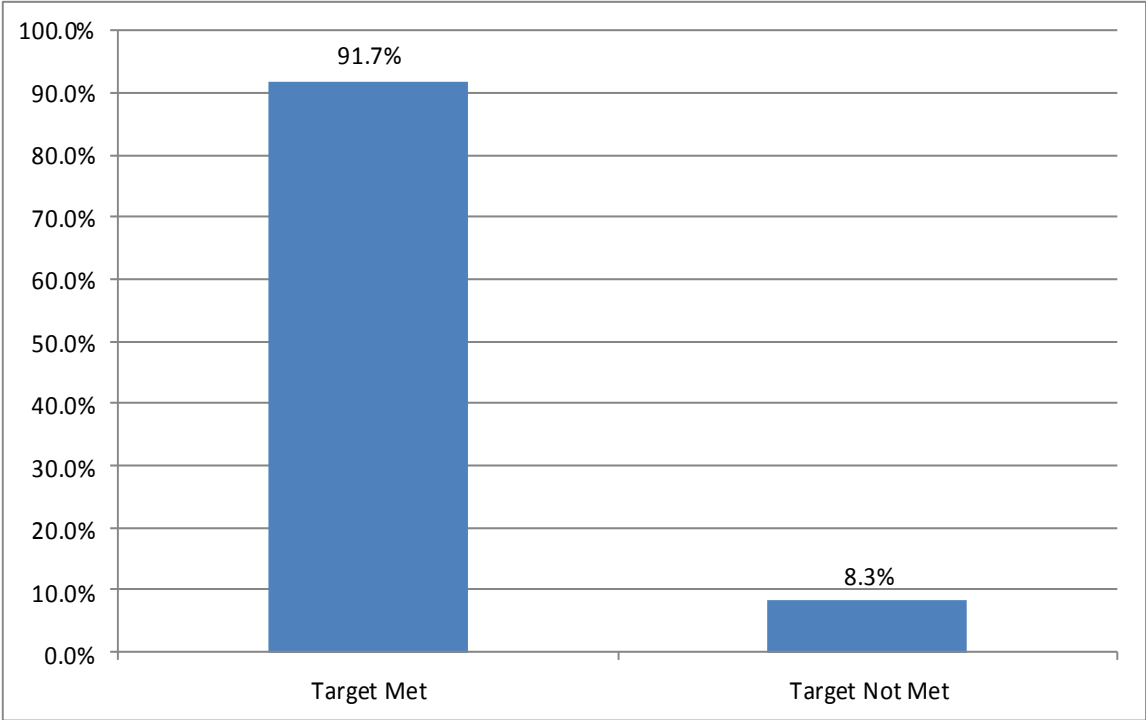
Performance against Stage 1 response target (20 working days)



There is no comparable data from 2012/13. Delays in responding were, in part, due to staffing restructures and changes in some key personnel. While it is important that officers work to the timescales it is recognised that this is not possible in all cases and that process should not necessarily come before successfully resolving the matter to the complainant's satisfaction. Where it is not going to be possible to meet the timescale the responding officer should agree an extension with the complainant and maintain a dialogue throughout the course of the investigation.

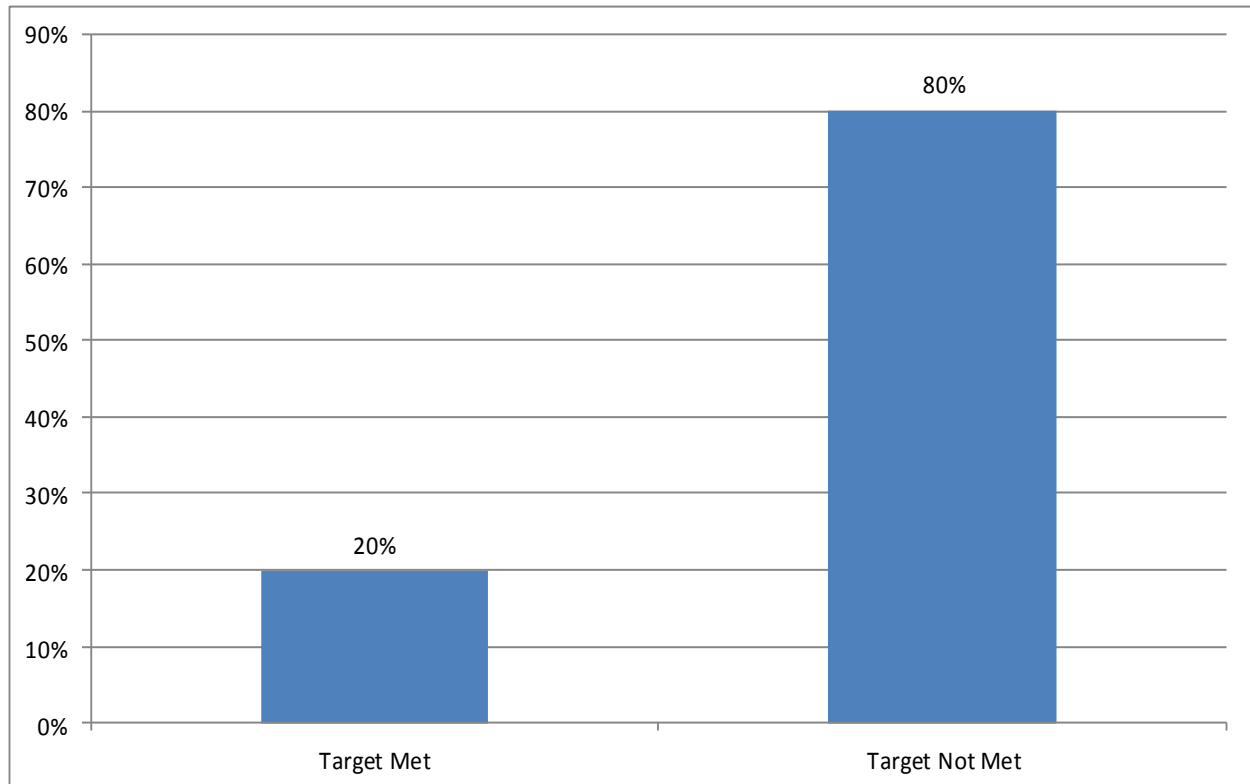
Stage 2

Performance against Stage 2 acknowledgement target (3 working days)



There is no comparable data from 2012/13. One complaint was not acknowledged within timescale.

Performance against Stage 2 response target (25 working days)



There is no comparable data from 2012/13. The delays in responding were primarily as a result of the extremely high volume of complaints received following the introduction of wheeled bins (*see the corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 20-13/14*) and the subsequent increase in the number of stage 2 complaints the Council's received (*A further 72 Stage 2 complaints were investigated under the Council's Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure*). In the majority of cases where it was not going to be possible to respond within timescale an extension was agreed with the complainant in accordance with the provisions of the housing procedure.