



**Housing Complaints,
Compliments and
Comments
Annual Report
2019/20**

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Introduction

This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2019/20 under the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the 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 Investigator or Complaints Manager.

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. In Darlington we do not currently have 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 'designated person' or 'democratic filter'. The 'designated person' or 'democratic filter' may help resolve the complaint directly, refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman or decide to do neither. If the 'designated person' or 'democratic filter' 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 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.

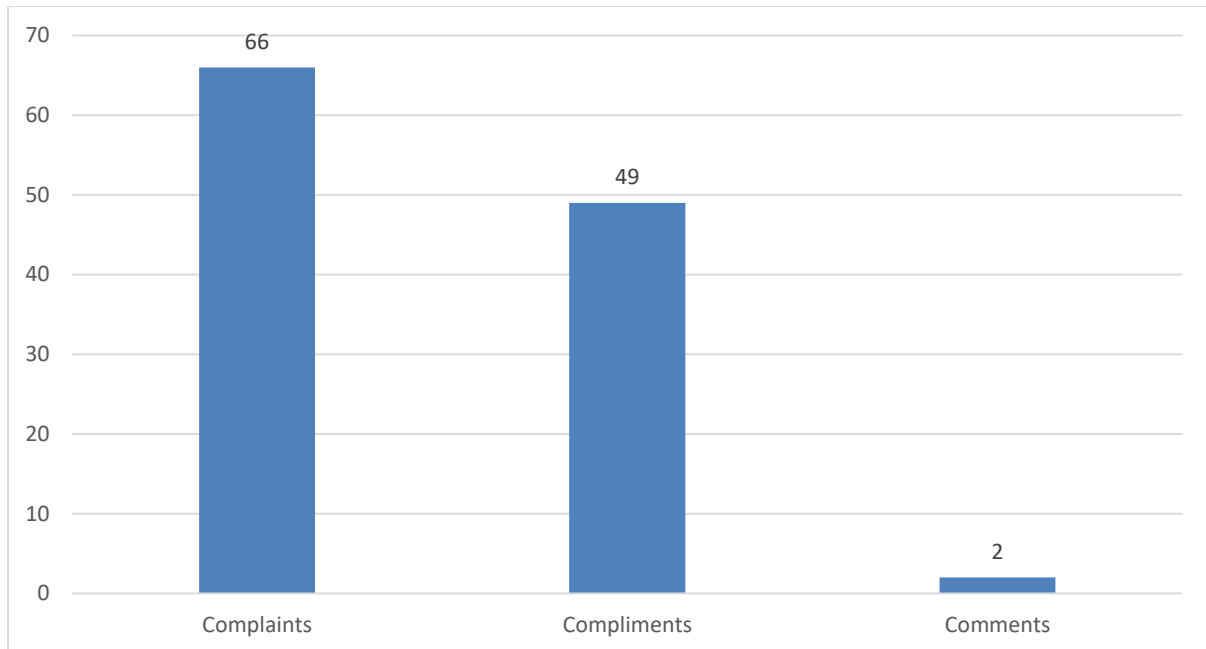
Information is available on the Council's website which contains an electronic form people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, email, via the web, over the phone, in person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

Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments

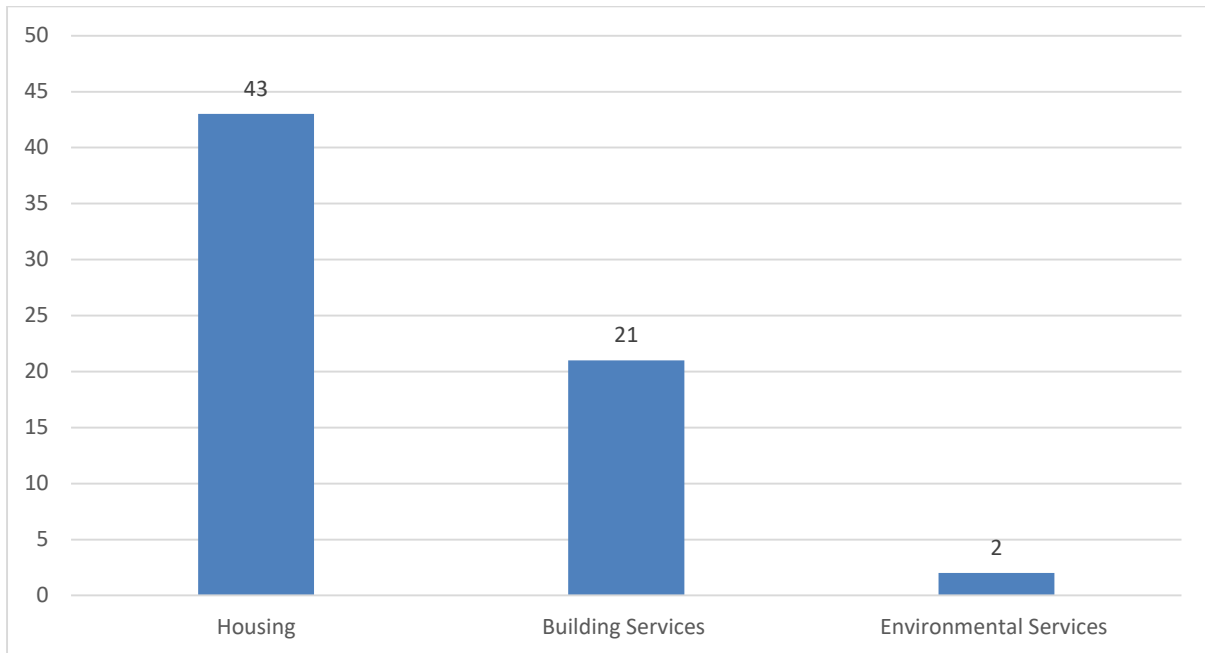


Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 the Council received a total of 66 complaints under the procedure, a reduction from 70 in 2018/19. A total of seven complaints were considered at Stage 2, a reduction from 10 in 2018/19. Six of the Stage 2 complaints were initially dealt with at Stage 1, while one was escalated directly to Stage 2. No complaints were considered at Stage 3, as was the case in 2018/19.

The Council received 49 compliments under the procedure, an increase from 28 in 2018/19.

The Council also receive 2 comments, the same number as in 2018/19.

Complaints by Service

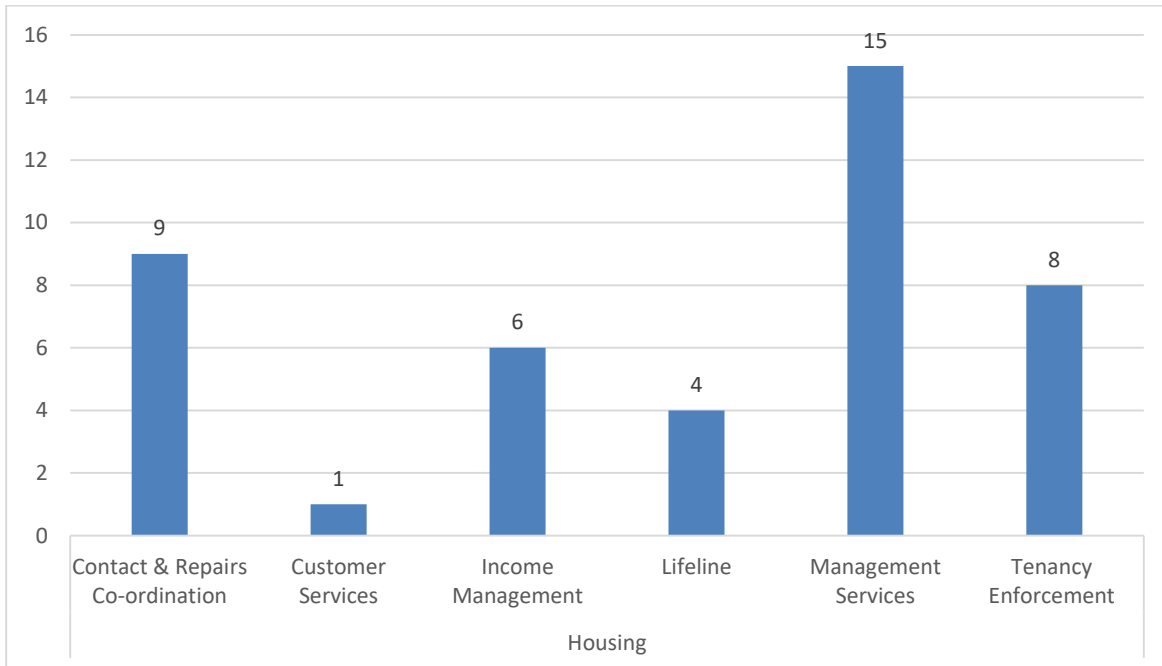


Housing received 42 complaints, an increase from 39 in 2018/19.

Building Services received 20 complaints, a decrease from 30 in 2018/19.

Environmental Services received two complaints, an increase from one in 2018/19.

Complaints by Team – Housing Service



Contact & Repairs Co-ordination received nine complaints, compared to zero in 2018/19.

Customer Services received one complaint, a decrease from three in 2018/19.

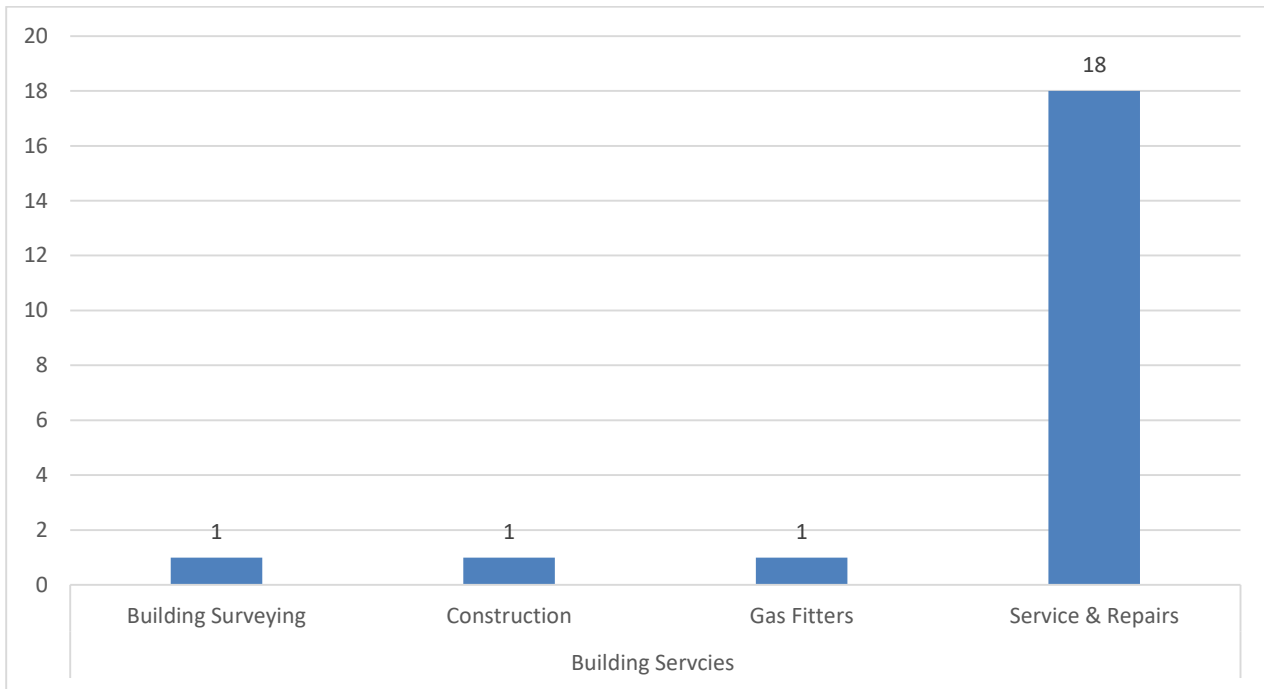
Housing Income Management received six complaints, the same number as in 2018/19.

Lifeline received one complaint, a decrease from four for Housing Options & Lifeline in 2018/19.

Management Services received 15 complaints, a decrease from 24 in 2018/19.

Tenancy Enforcement received eight complaints, an increase from zero in 2018/19.

Complaints by Team – Building Services



Building Surveying received one complaint, the same number for Surveyor in 2018/19.

Construction received one complaint, compared to zero in 2018/19.

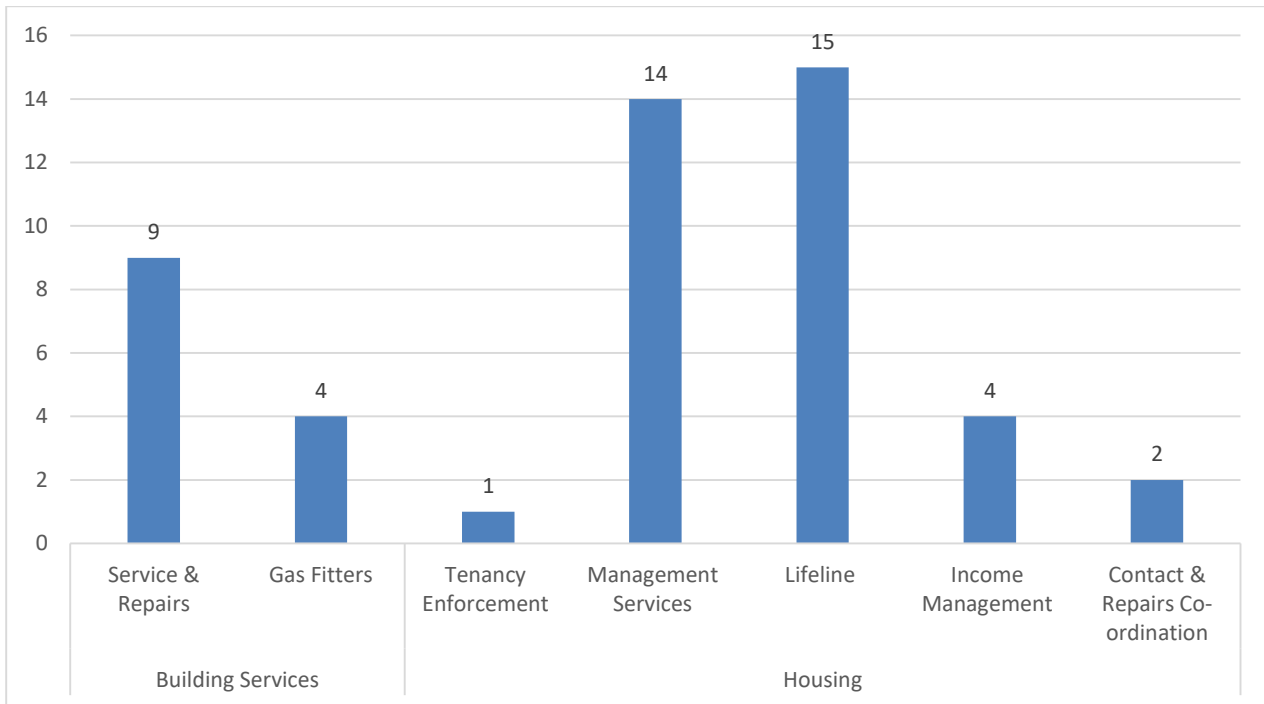
Gas Fitters received one complaint, a decrease from two in 2018/19.

Service & Repairs received 18 complaints, a decrease from 24 in 2018/19.

Complaints by Team -Environmental Services

Building Cleaning received two complaints, an increase from zero in 2018/19.

Compliments by Service Area/Team



Housing received 36 compliments, an increase from 16 in 2018/19.

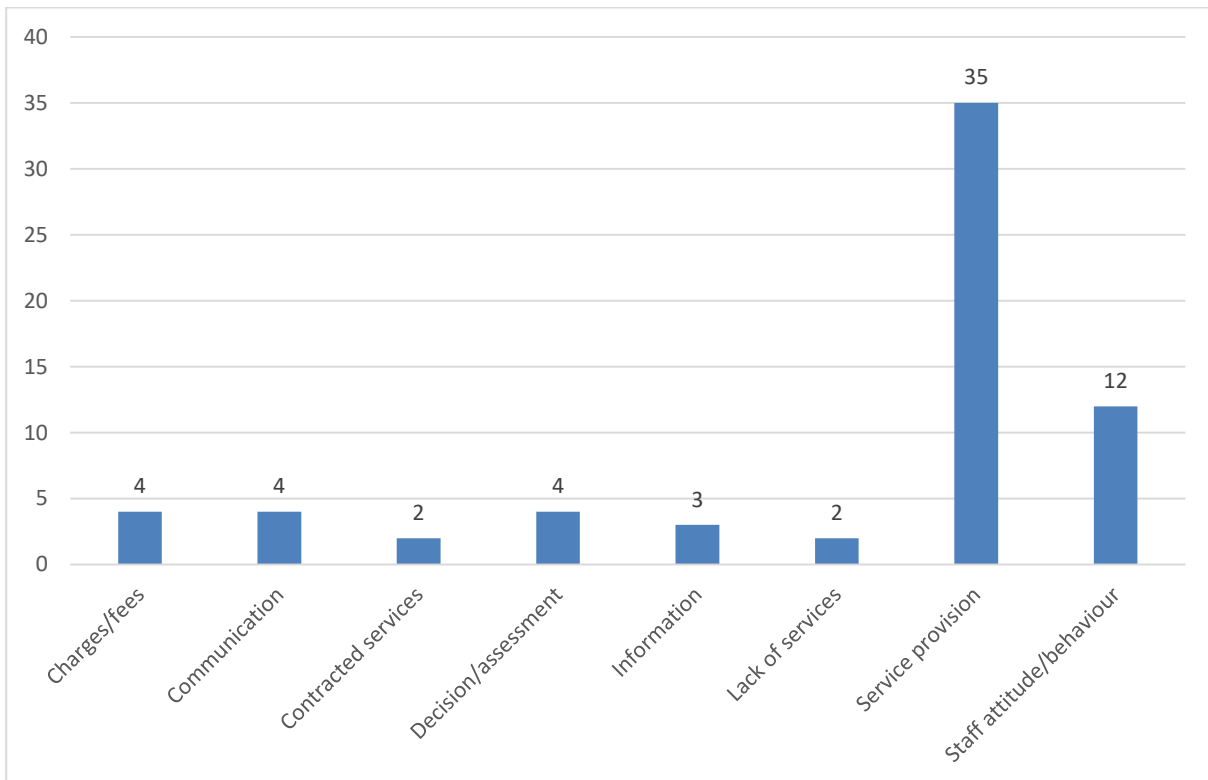
Building Services received 13 compliments, an increase from 12 in 2018/19.

Comments by Service Area/Team

The Council received two comments during 2019/20, a decrease from three in 2018/19.

One was for Lifeline, while the other was for Management Services.

Complaints by Issue



Four complaints concerned charges/fees, an increase from three in 2018/19.

Four complaints related to communication, a decrease from eight in 2018/19.

Two complaints concerned contracted services, an increase from zero in 2018/19.

Four complaints related to decisions/assessment, an increase from three 2018/19.

Three complaints related to information, an increase from one in 2018/19.

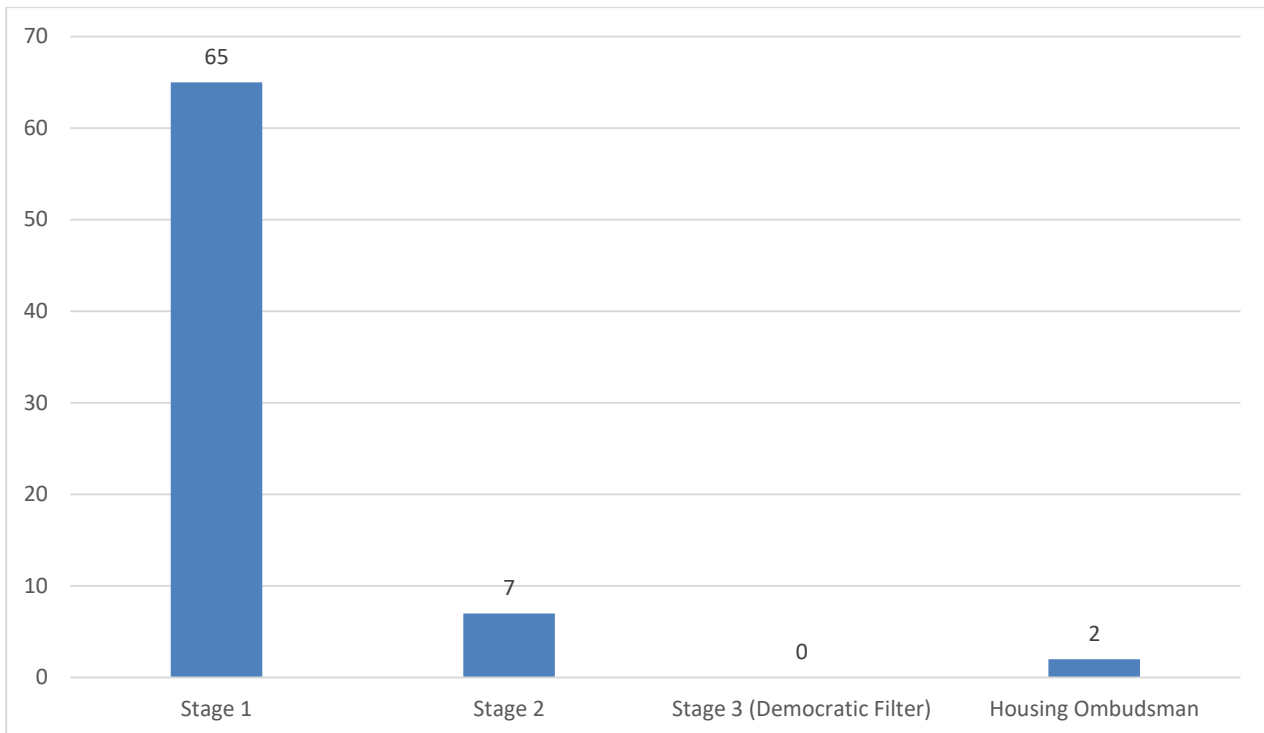
Two complaints were about a lack of services, the same number as in 2018/19.

35 complaints related to service provision, a decrease from 44 in 2018/19.

12 complaints related to staff attitude/behaviour, an increase from nine in 2018/19.

Complaints by Stage

The below graph shows the number of complaints received at each stage of the procedure during 2019/20.



The Council received 65 Stage 1 complaints, a reduction from 69 in 2018/19.

Six were escalated to Stage 2, and one was investigated directly at Stage 2. A total of seven complaints were considered at Stage 2, a reduction from 10 in 2018/19.

Two complaints were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman, the same number as in 2018/19.

Complaints by Outcome

The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2019/20.

Stage 1

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Housing						
Income Management	0	3	1	1	0	5
Housing Management Services	0	0	0	1	0	1
Management Services	2	9	1	1	0	13
Tenancy Enforcement	1	3	0	0	0	4
Contact & Repairs Co-ordination	1	0	1	5	0	7
Lifeline	0	1	1	0	3	5
Total for Housing	4	16	4	8	3	35
Building Services						
Building Surveying	0	0	1	0	0	1
Construction	0	1	0	0	0	1
Gas Fitters	0	0	0	1	0	1
Service & Repairs 19/20	1	4	1	11	2	19
Total for Building Services	1	5	2	12	2	22
Environmental Services						
Building Cleaning & Compliance	0	0	2	0	0	2
Total for Environmental Services	0	0	2	0	0	2
Totals	5	21	8	20	5	59

Stage 2

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Housing						
Income Management	0	0	1	0	0	1
Management Services	0	1	1	2	0	4
Total for Housing	0	1	2	2	0	5
Building Services						
Building Surveying	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total for Building Services	0	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	0	1	3	2	0	6

Stage 3

The 'designated person' or 'democratic filter' did not determine any complaints during 2019/20.

Housing Ombudsman

The Housing Ombudsman determined one complaint during 2019/20, a decrease from four in 2018/19.

Full details of those complaints determined by the Housing Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 3 December 2019 and 15 September 2020 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).

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 2019/20 and are detailed below:

Following a complaint for Housing Management Services officers were reminded of the importance of the correct procedure to follow when considering requests for major adaptations.

Following another complaint for Housing Management Services officers who are responsible for carrying out void inspections were reminded of all the items they are required to inspect.

Following a further complaint for Housing Management Services the process was changed to ensure vans always have at least one of a particular boiler on shelf in future.

Following a complaint for Building Surveying it was recommended that officers ensure they keep accurate records of correspondence with Housing tenants.

Following a complaint for Income Management it was recommended that the Council considers how it can better plan works to ensure they are included in Section 125 notices in future; thereby ensuring they can appropriately charge leaseholders and reduce the likelihood of complaints/claims from leaseholders who have undertaken works which were planned, but of which they were not notified.

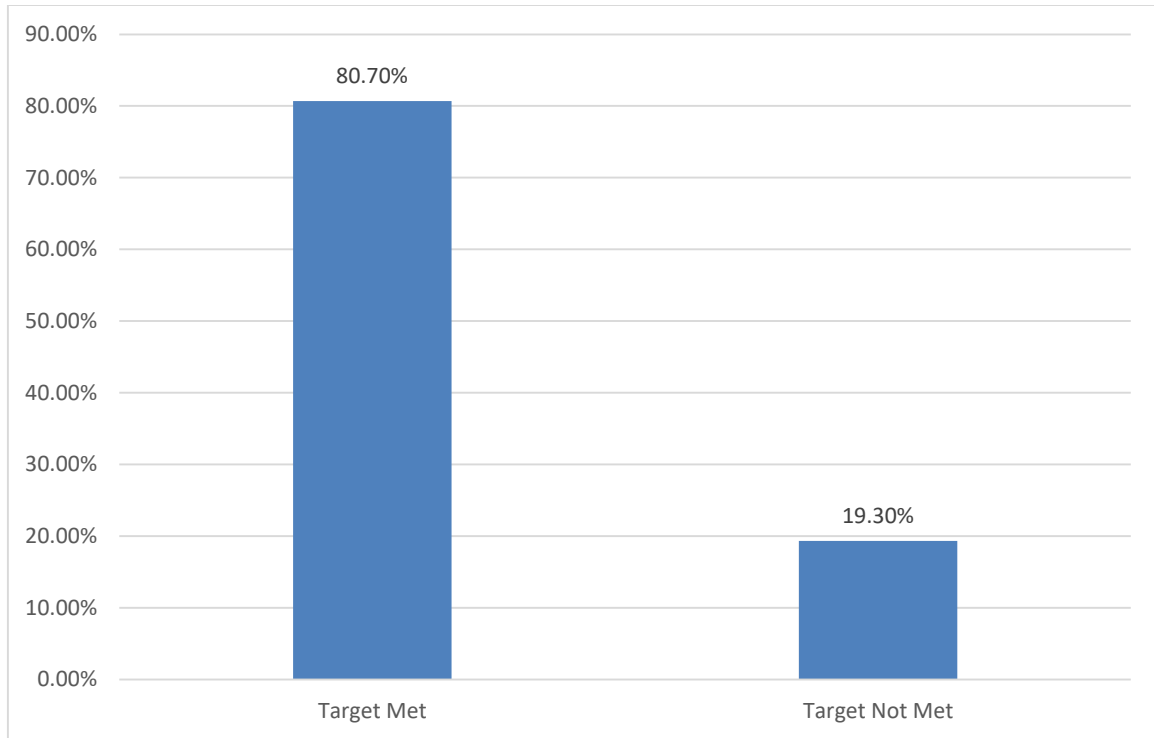
Following a complaint for Service & Repairs it was identified there was a need to improve knowledge of a particular type of heating system, ensure spare parts are available for a quick response and have full units in stock in case they need to be exchanged.

Performance against the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

The below graphs show performance in relation to those complaints responded to during 2019/20.

Stage 1

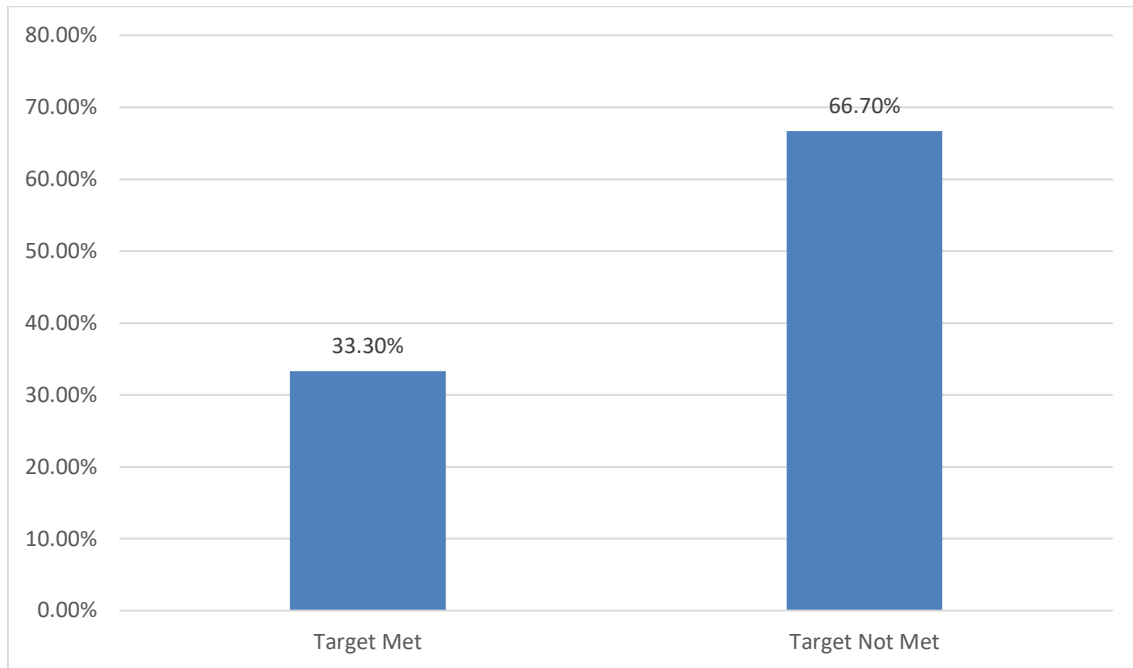
Performance against Stage 1 response target (25 working days)



This was an increase in performance against the Stage 1 response target from 74.3% in 2018/19.

Stage 2

Performance against Stage 2 response target (30 working days)



This was an increase in performance against the Stage 2 response target from 18.20% in 2018/19.

Further recommendations

The Council should continue to work on improving performance against the Stage 2 response target.