



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

**Housing Complaints,
Compliments and Comments
Annual Report
2022/23**

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Introduction

1. This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2022/23 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.
2. 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

3. 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).
4. The procedure has 2 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, and we aim to resolve the majority of complaints at Stage 1 of the procedure. Unlike our corporate complaints, which have a target response time of 25 working days, Housing complaints require a response within 10 working days, in line with the Housing Ombudsman's new Complaint Handling Code timescales, introduced in 2021.
5. Housing Services has recently employed a dedicated Housing Complaints Officer to investigate the majority of Housing complaints and to ensure that the service can meet the stage 1 complaint response timescales during 2023/24. Where a response cannot be given within 10 working days, due to the complexity of the issues being raised, the Housing Complaints Officer will contact the complainant to agree an extension.
6. Stage 2 is a formal investigation stage where complaints will usually be investigated by the Complaints Investigator or Complaints Manager.

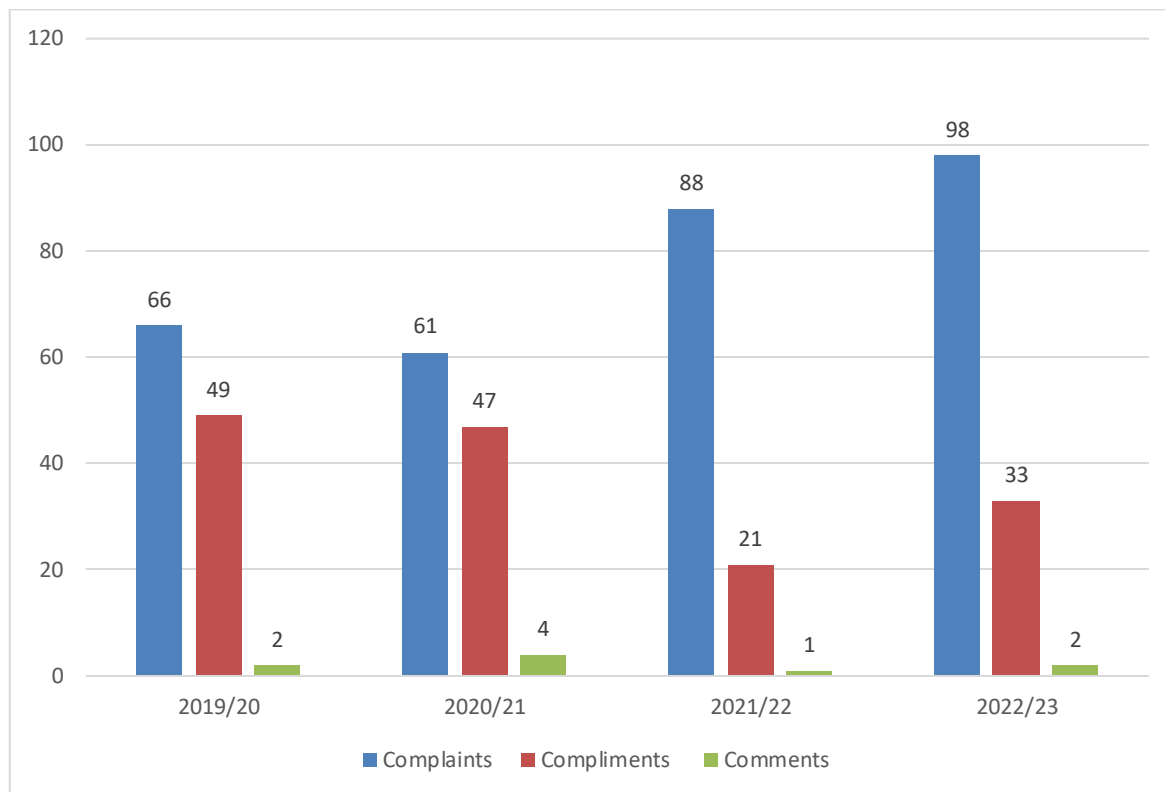
Public Information and Accessibility

7. 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.
8. 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.
9. The Council can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Complaints Information and Organisational Learning

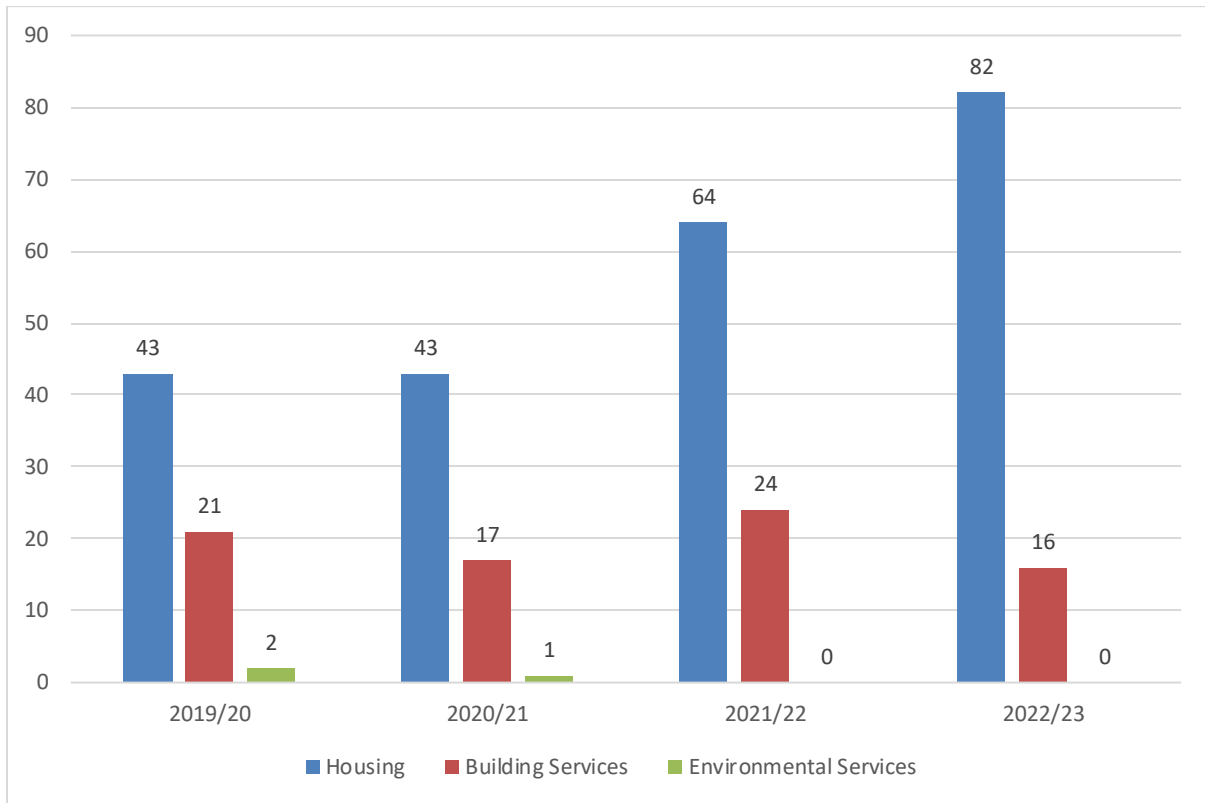
Overview of Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments



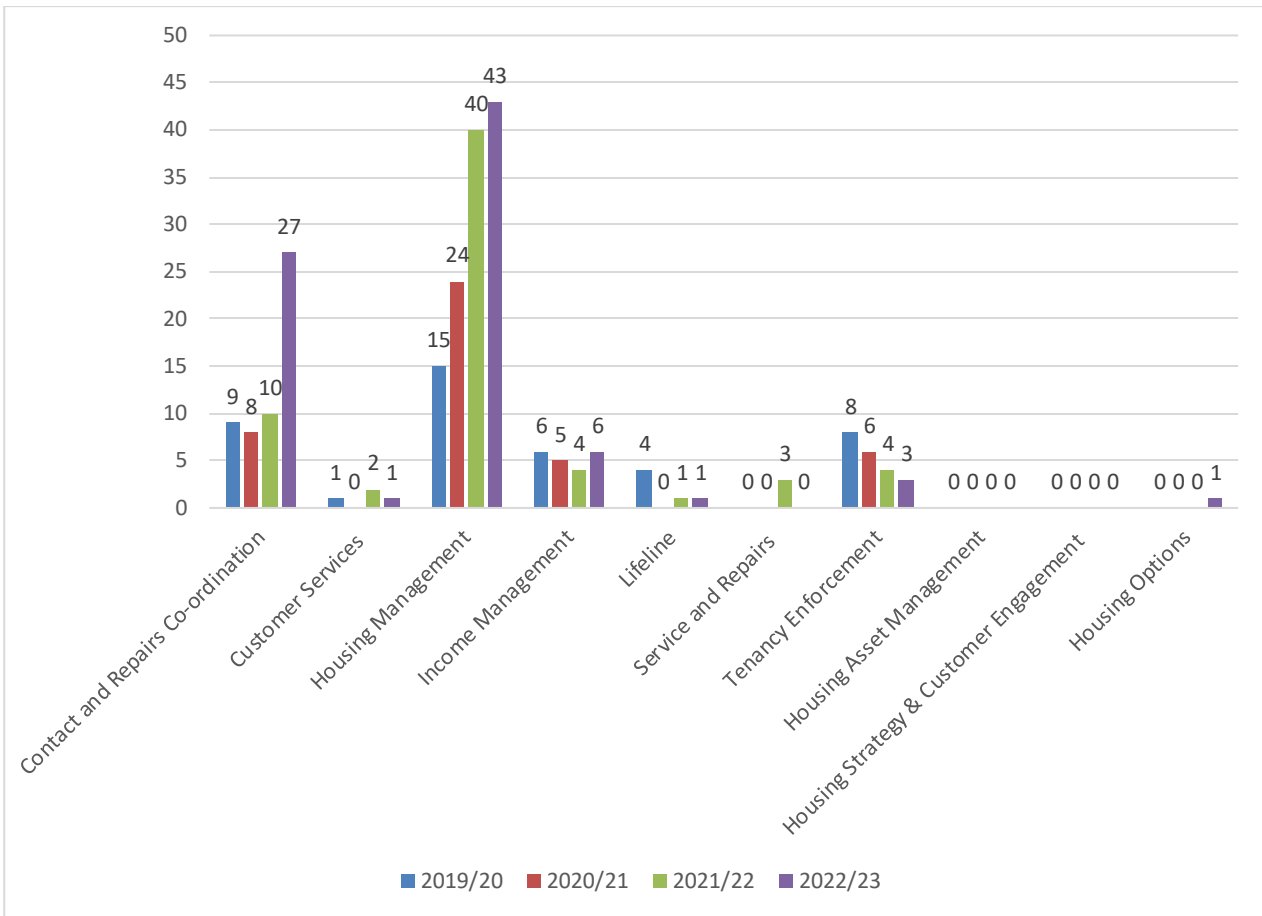
10. Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 the Council received a total of 98 complaints under the procedure, an increase from 88 in 2021/22, and an increase from 61 in 2020/21 and 66 in 2019/20.
11. A total of 17 complaints were considered at Stage 2, an increase from 16 in 2021/22, 13 in 2020/21 and seven in 2019/20. All of the Stage 2 complaints were initially dealt with at Stage 1.
12. The Council received 33 compliments under the procedure, an increase from 21 compliments in 2021/22, although a decrease from 47 in 2020/21 and 49 in 2019/20.
13. The Council also receive two comments under the procedure, an increase from one in 2021/22, a decrease from four in 2020/21 and the same number as in 2019/20.

Complaints by Service



14. Housing received 82 complaints, an increase from 64 in 2021/22 and 43 in 2020/21 and 2019/20.
15. Building Services received 16 complaints, a decrease from 24 in 2021/22, 17 in 2020/21 and 21 in 2019/20.
16. Environmental Services did not receive any complaints, as was the case in 2021/22, a decrease from one in 2020/21 and two in 2019/20.

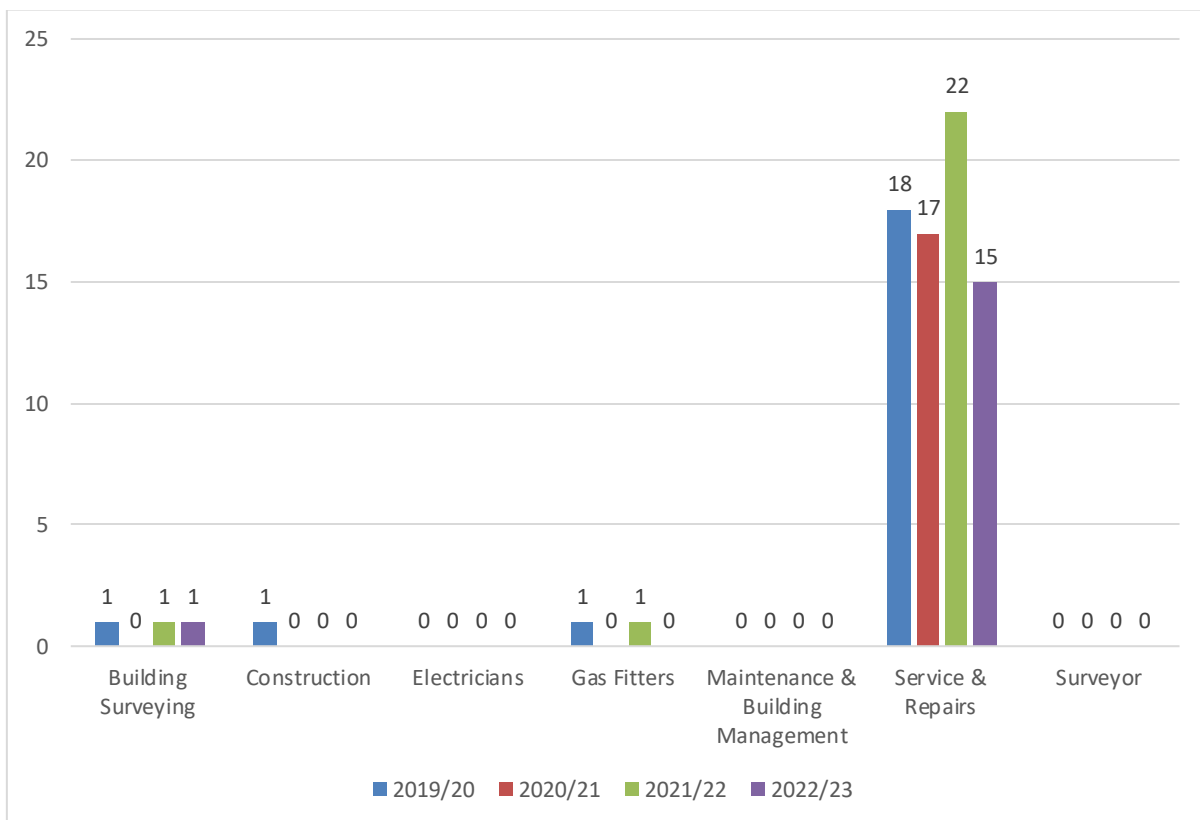
Complaints by Team – Housing Services



17. Contact and Repairs Co-ordination received 27 complaints in 2022/23, an increase from 10 in 2021/22, eight complaints in 2020/21 and nine in 2019/20. Complaints concerned communication, appointments not being kept and delays in undertaking repairs.
18. Customer Services received one complaint in 2022/23, a decrease from two in 2021/22, an increase from zero in 2020/21 and the same number as in 2019/20.
19. Housing Management received 43 complaints in 2022/23, an increase from 40 in 2021/22, and an increase from 24 in 2020/21 and 15 in 2019/20. There is no particular theme that would account for the increase between 2020/21 and 2021/22. Complaints concerned communication and the general service provided in relation to various housing management issues.
20. Housing Income Management received six complaints in 2022/23, an increase from four in 2021/22, five in 2020/21 and the same number as in 2019/20. There were no identifiable themes in the complaints received.
21. Lifeline received one complaint in 2022/23, the same number as in 2021/22, an increase from zero in 2020/21, but a decrease from four in 2019/20.

- 22. Service and Repairs received zero complaints in 2022/23, a decrease from three in 2021/22 and the same number as in 2020/21 and 2019/20.
- 23. Tenancy Enforcement received three complaints in 2022/23, a decrease from four in 2021/22, six in 2020/21 and eight in 2019/20.
- 24. Housing Asset Management did not receive any complaints in 2022/23, as was the case in 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20.
- 25. Housing Strategy & Customer Engagement also did not receive any complaints in 2022/23, as was the case in 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20.
- 26. Housing Options received one complaint in 2022/23, an increase from zero in 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20.

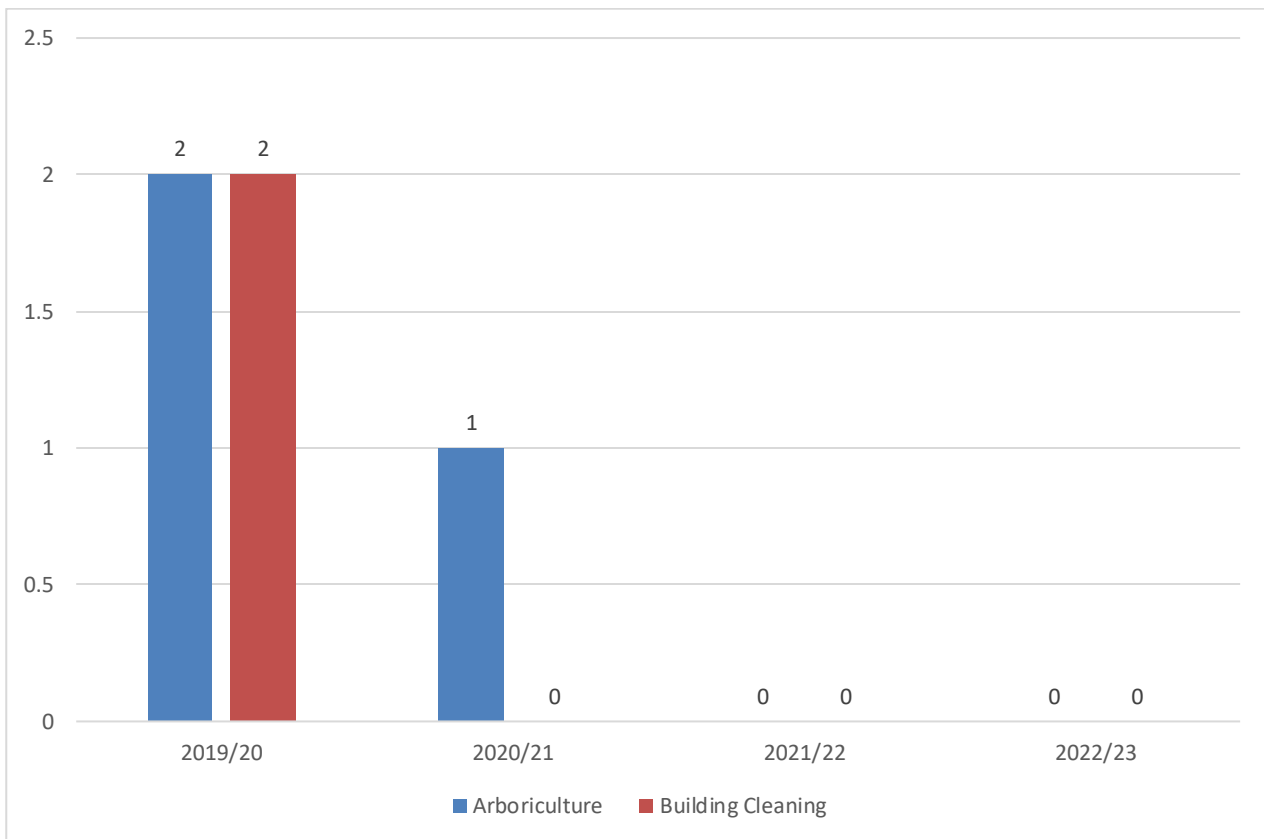
Complaints by Team – Building Services



- 27. Building Surveying received one complaint in 2022/23, the same number as in 2021/22, an increase from zero in 2020/21 and the same number as in 2019/20.
- 28. Construction received zero complaints in 2022/23, the same as in 2021/22 and 2020/21 and a decrease from one in 2019/20.

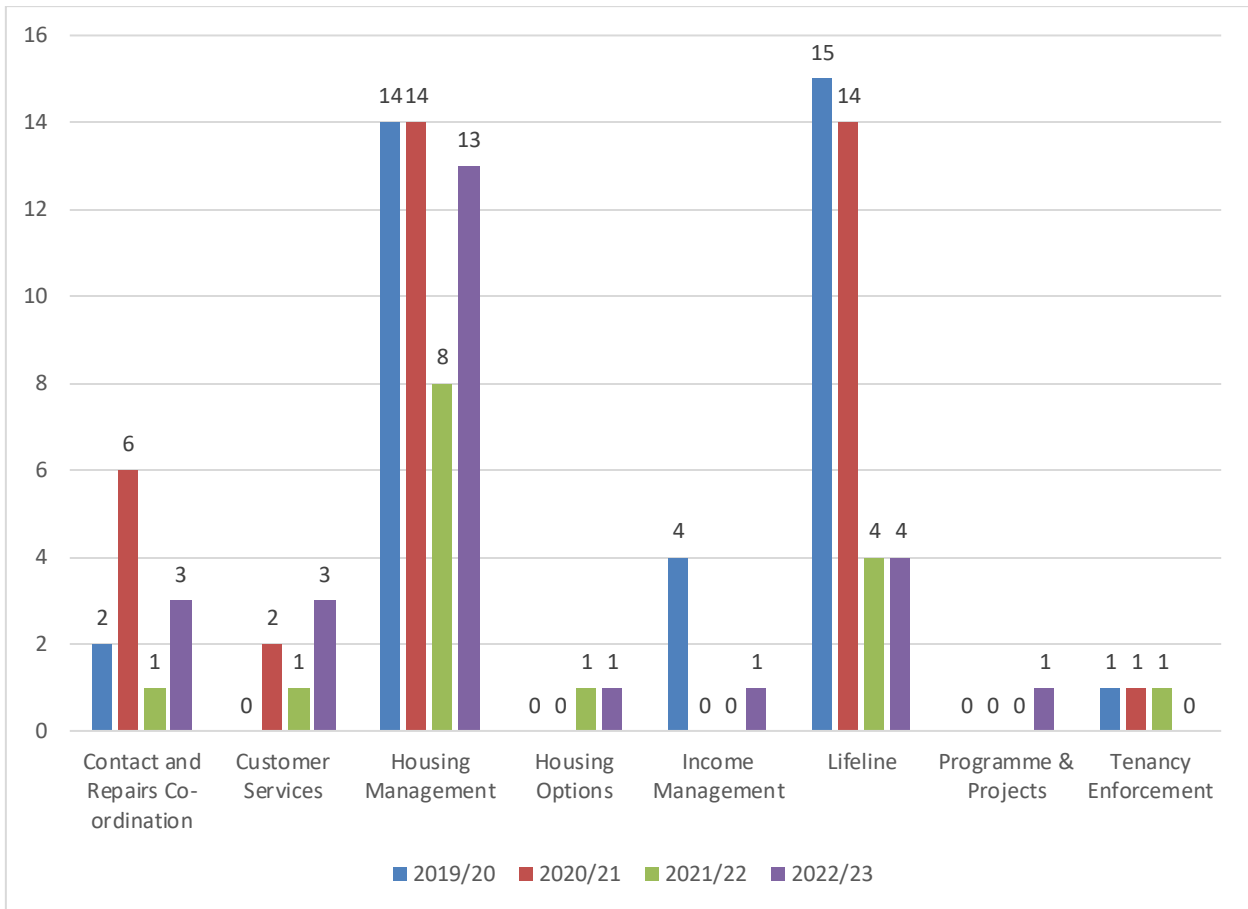
- 29. Electricians received zero complaints in 2022/23, as was the case in 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20.
- 30. Gas Fitters received zero complaints in 2022/23, a decrease from one in 2021/22, the same number as in 2020/21 and a decrease from one in 2019/20.
- 31. Maintenance & Building Management received zero complaints in 2022/23, as was the case in 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20.
- 32. Service & Repairs received 15 complaints in 2022/23, a decrease from 22 in 2021/22, 17 in 2020/21 and 18 in 2019/20. The most common cause of complaints were dissatisfaction with quality of repairs, the time take to complete repairs and staff attitude.
- 33. Surveyor received zero complaints in 2022/23, as was the case in 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20.

Complaints by Team - Environmental Services



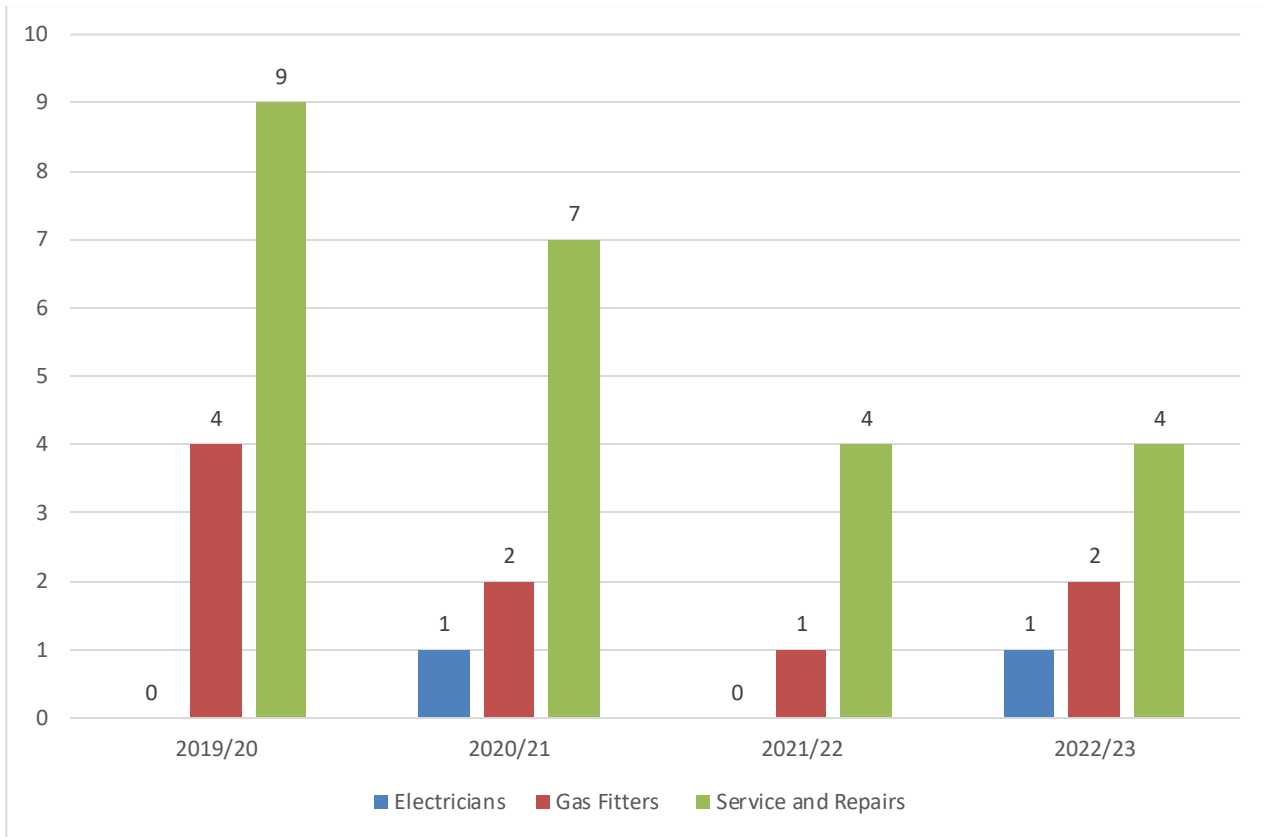
34. Arboriculture did not receive any complaints in 2022/23, as was the case in 2021/22, a decrease from one in 2020/21 and two in 2019/20.
35. Building Cleaning did not receive any complaints in 2022/23, as was the case in 2021/22 and 2020/21, a decrease from two in 2019/20.

Compliments by Team – Housing Services



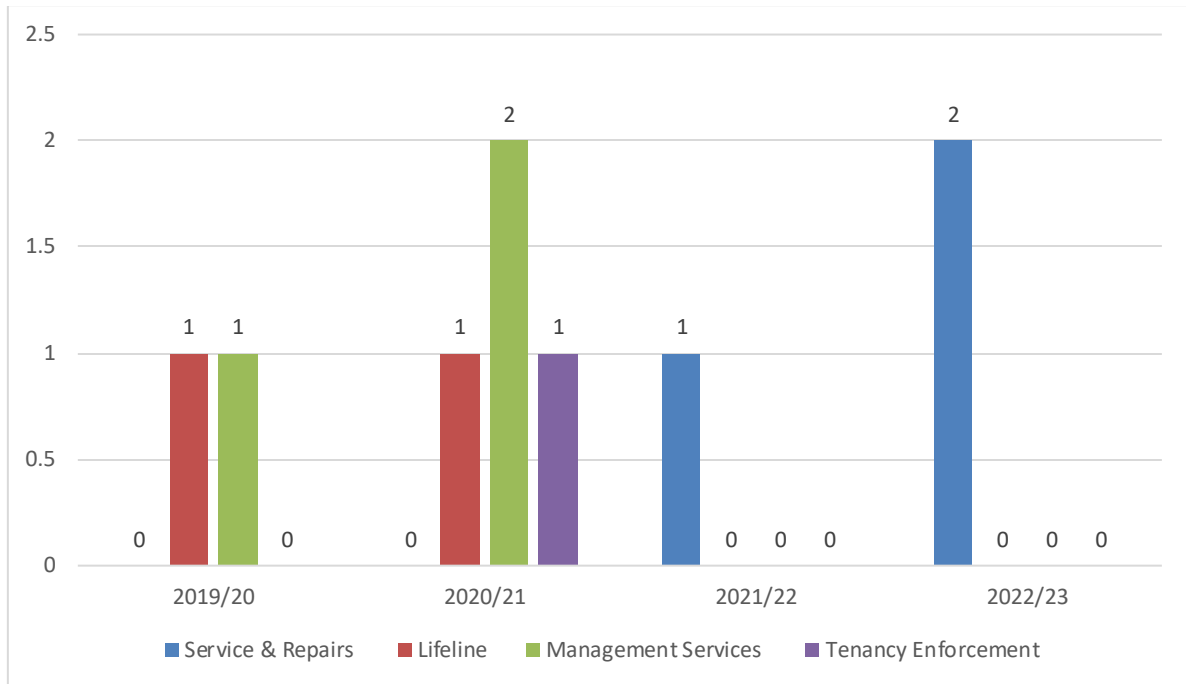
36. Housing received 26 compliments in 2022/23, an increase from 16 in 2021/22, a decrease from 37 in 2020/21 and 36 in 2019/20.

Compliments by Team – Building Services



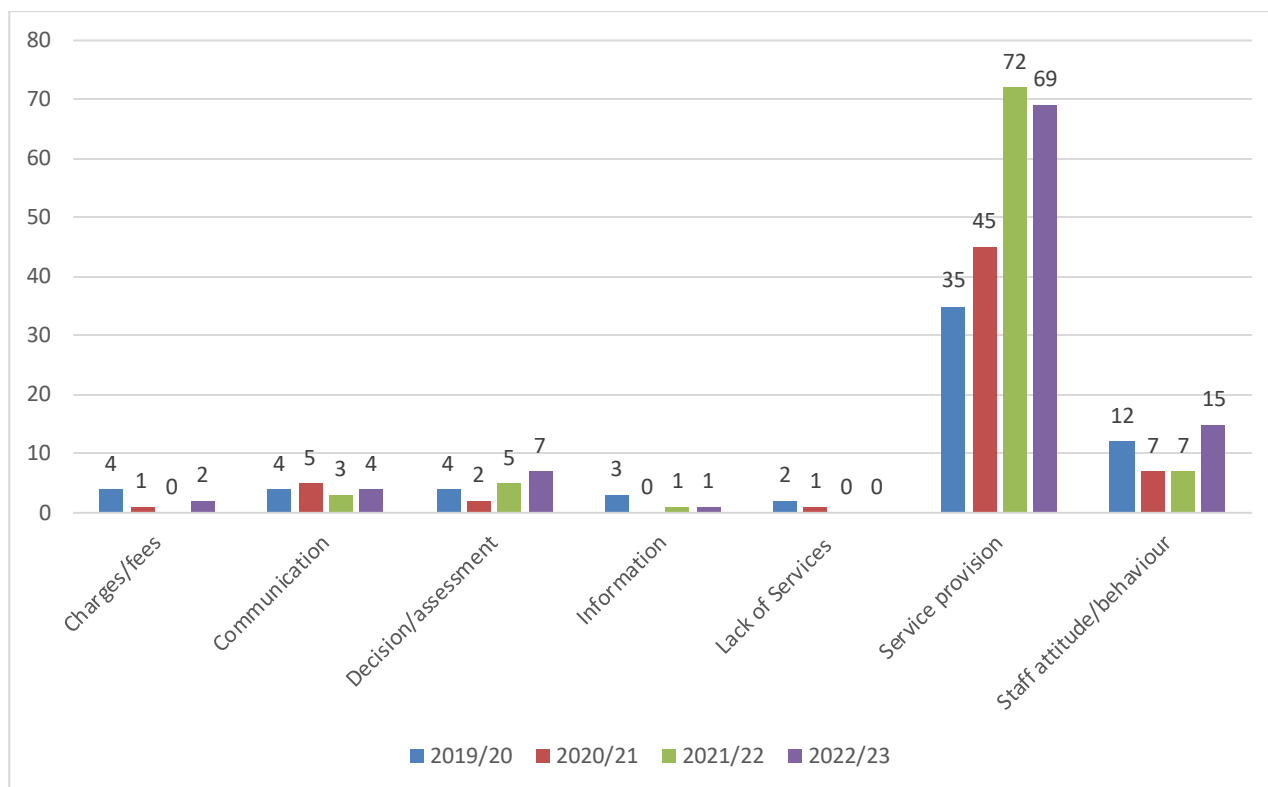
37. Building Services received seven compliment in 2022/23, an increase from five in 2021/22, a decrease from 10 in 2020/21 and 13 in 2019/20.

Comments by Team - Housing



38. The Council received two comments in 2022/23, an increase from one in 2021/22, a decrease from four 2020/21 and the same number as in 2019/20.

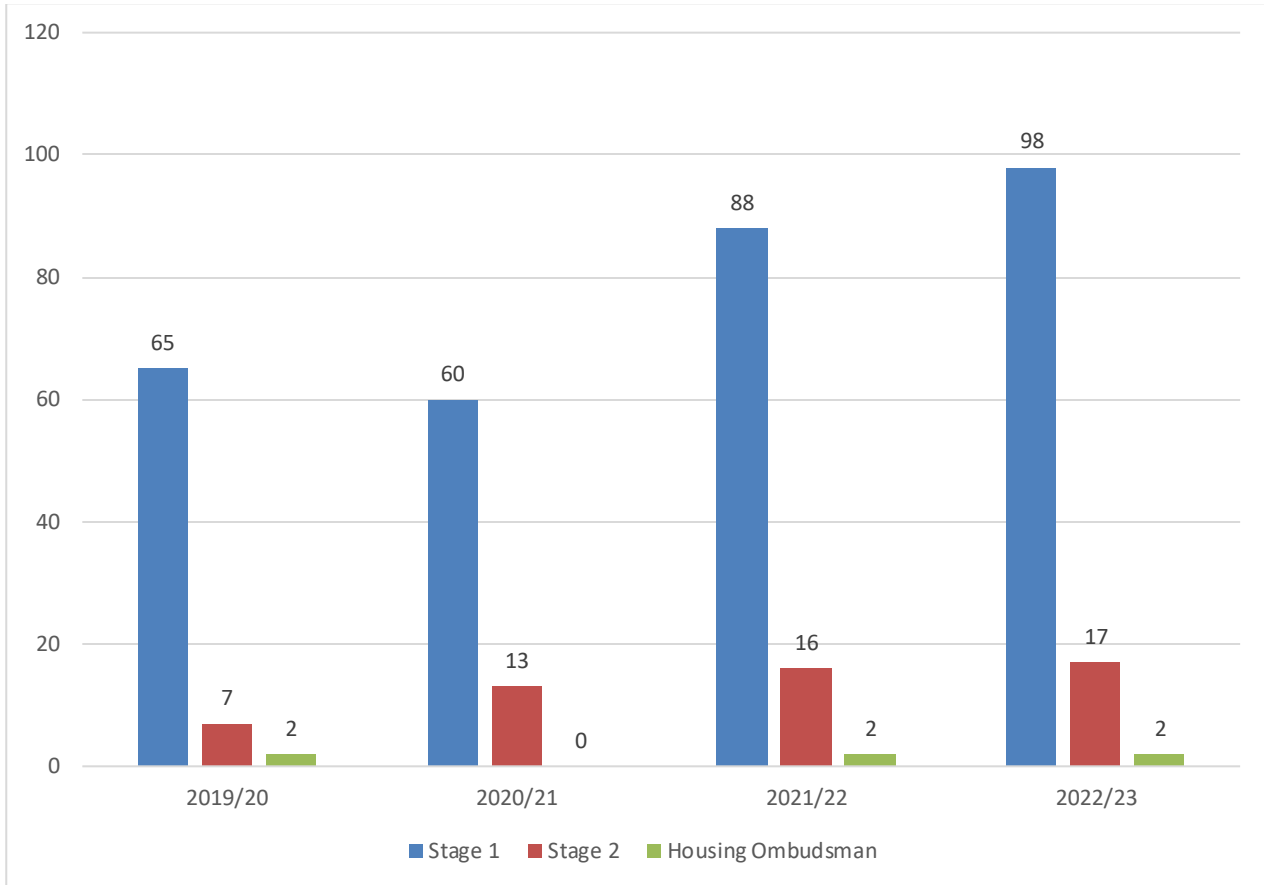
Complaints by Issue



- 39. Two complaints related to charges/fees in 2022/23, an increase from zero in 2021/22, one in 2020/21, although a decrease from four in 2019/20.
- 40. Four complaints related to communication during 2022/23, an increase from three in 2021/22, a decrease from five in 2020/21 and the same number as in 2019/20.
- 41. Seven complaints related to decision/assessments, an increase from five in 2021/22, two in 2020/21 and four 2019/20.
- 42. One complaint related to information in 2022/23, the same as in 2021/22 an increase from zero in 2020/21 and a decrease from three in 2019/20.
- 43. There were no complaints about lack of services in 2022/23, as was the case in 2021/22, a decrease from one in 2020/21 and two in 2019/20.
- 44. There were 69 complaints about service provision in 2022/23, a decrease from 72 in 2021/22, although an increase from 45 in 2020/21 and 35 in 2019/20.
- 45. 15 complaints related to staff attitude/behaviour in 2022/23, an increase from seven in 2021/22 and 2020/21 and 12 in 2019/20.

Complaints by Stage

46. The below graph shows the number of complaints received at each stage of the procedure during 2022/23.



47. The Council received 98 Stage 1 complaints in 2022/23, an increase from 88 in 2021/22, 60 in 2020/21 and 65 in 2019/20.

48. 17 were investigated at Stage 2, an increase from 16 in 2021/22, 13 in 2020/21 and seven in 2019/20.

49. Two complaints were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman, as was the case in 2021/22, an increase from zero in 2020/21 and the same number as in 2019/20.

Complaints Outcomes

50. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2022/23.

Stage 1

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
<i>Housing</i>						
Customer Services	0	0	1	0	0	1
Income Management	0	2	0	2	2	6
Housing Management Services	0	1	1	1	0	3
Housing Management	0	18	8	12	3	41
Tenancy Enforcement	0	3	0	0	0	3
Contact and Repairs Co-ordination	0	2	14	8	3	27
Housing Options	0	0	1	0	0	1
Lifeline	0	1	0	0	0	1
<i>Building Services</i>						
Building Surveying	0	0	0	1	0	1
Service & Repairs	0	2	2	14	3	21
Totals	0	29	27	38	11	105

Stage 2

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
<i>Housing</i>						
Customer Services	0	0	0	1	0	1
Income Management	0	0	1	0	0	1
Housing Management	0	1	0	0	0	1
Tenancy Enforcement	0	1	0	0	0	1
Totals	0	2	1	1	0	4

Housing Ombudsman

51. The Housing Ombudsman did not determine and complaints during 2022/23, a decrease from two in 2021/22 and one in 2020/21 and 2019/20.
52. Full details of those complaints determined by the Housing Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 6 December 2022 and 5 September 2023 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).

Organisational Learning

53. 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 2022/23 and are detailed below.

Contact and Repairs Co-ordination

54. It was agreed the Council would use the learning from the complaint to inform the process it was developing around requests for the installation of Electric Vehicle charging points and ensure this was shared with officers. Officers were also reminded of the Council's Customer Standards.
55. A better processes for major work voids after a re-wire was to be carried out with Building Services.
56. Officers were reminded to escalate and deal with outstanding repairs/delays once it is brought to their attention.
57. It was agreed training and guidance would be given to the Housing Contact Team to escalate ongoing repairs to a member of senior management.
58. It was also agreed Building Services would review their referral procedures post inspection to implement best practice moving forward and brief the team on the importance of booking in follow on work after visiting a tenant and identifying further repair work is required.
59. Housing Services considered developing a process to ensure that when a new housing management officer takes over an area all pre-existing repairs are able to be followed up.

Customer Services

60. It was agreed the team would be reminded that they can allow customers to escalate a call if requested and the importance of quoting standard response timescales.

Housing Management

61. A review of time taken to install remeasured windows was undertaken and a recommendation that items like this are dealt with by the Service Desk rather than at site level was made.
62. It was agreed that Housing Services would review the process with Environmental Health on pest infestation reports.

63. It was also agreed the Housing Contact Team would be informed that if a tenant contacts on two occasions regarding outstanding repair work, they should inform the Housing Management Officer who can then chase this up with the company and tenant.

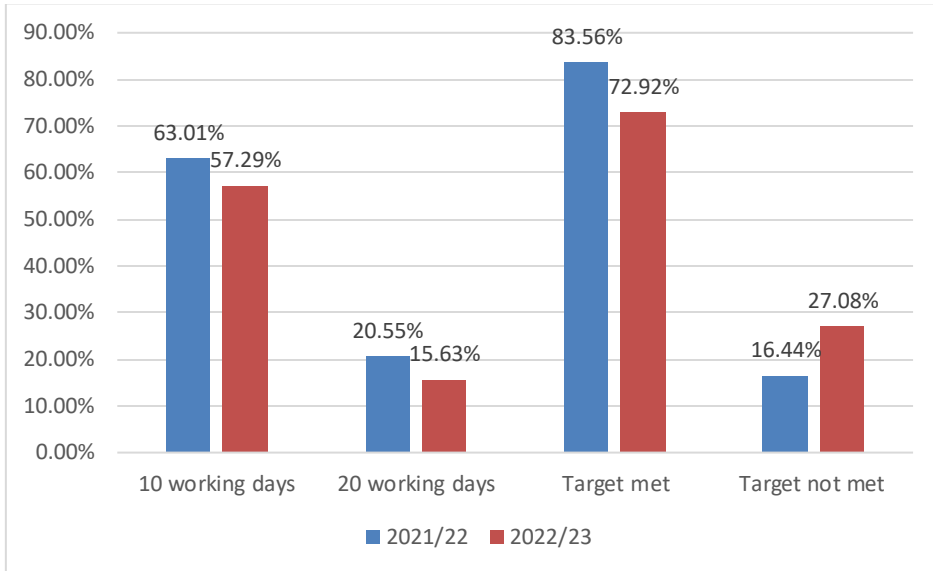
Income Management

64. It was agreed training would be provided by the Team Leader in relation to responses to detailed queries from customers via digital tenancy.

Performance against the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

Stage 1

Performance against Stage 1 response target (10 working days, with an extension up to 20 working days)



Stage 2

Performance against Stage 2 response target (20 working days, with an extension up to 30 working days)



Further recommendations

65. The Housing Services team should work to improve performance against the Housing stage 1 response target, as set out in paragraph 5 of the report.
66. The Complaints & Information Governance Team should work to improve performance against the Housing Stage 2 response target.