



# Cambridge City Council

## Annual Complaints and Feedback Report 2021 - 22

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## Cambridge City Council's Annual Complaints & Feedback 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Report, which gives an overview of the complaints the Council has received and how we have dealt with them (though we do not publish names or other personal details of people who have complained).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 be transparent about the complaints we've received, how we've responded to them 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 2021-22: summary

### Total number of complaints received

In 2021-22, the total number of complaints received was 973, which is an increase of 182 (23%) from the previous year's total of 791.

The council received 1145 complaints in 2019/20 and 1161 in 2018/19.

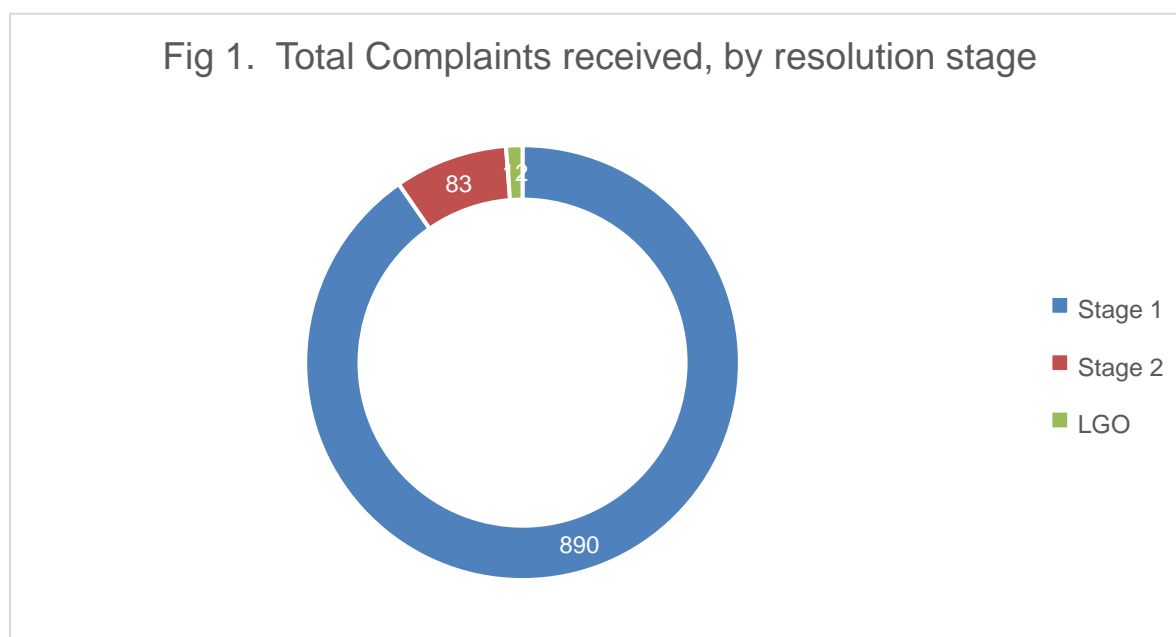
### Proportion resolved at stage 1 and stage 2

Of those 973 complaints, 91% were resolved successfully at the first stage without need for escalation. This compares with 93% in 2020-21, and 92% in 2019-20.

83 complaints were escalated to stage two, which is 28 more than the 55 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, 88% were resolved within the target time of ten working days. This represents a further improvement on recent years, where 85% were responded to within time in 2020-21, and 81% in 2019-20.



Stage 1	Stage 2	LGO
890	83	12

## Overview of complaint trends

207 (21%) of all complaints received by the Council were for Waste Services. This represented a slight decrease of 16 from the 223 complaints received in 2020-21 which represented 28% 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 number of complaints in the year, the service continued to receive a number of compliments relating to the service being provided.

Whilst Waste Services saw a decrease in the number of complaints received when compared with the previous years, some other services saw the number of complaints received increased compared to the previous year. This wasn't totally unexpected as restrictions relating to Covid-19 began to be lifted. The two services with the largest increases were Commercial Services and Community Services, both of which had a much-reduced service during the pandemic. As residents began to use car parks, and Cambridge Live venues again for instance, they also began to raise complaints about these service areas.

Housing Maintenance & Assets, Planning and Housing Services also saw an increase in complaints compared to the previous year. The Housing Maintenance and Assets increase came in the Responsive Repairs area due to a backlog of work which was impacted by covid related illness or isolation requirement in the team. The increase in the Housing service related to Home-Link application processing time, and work has been done to streamline this process.

### **The impact of Covid-19**

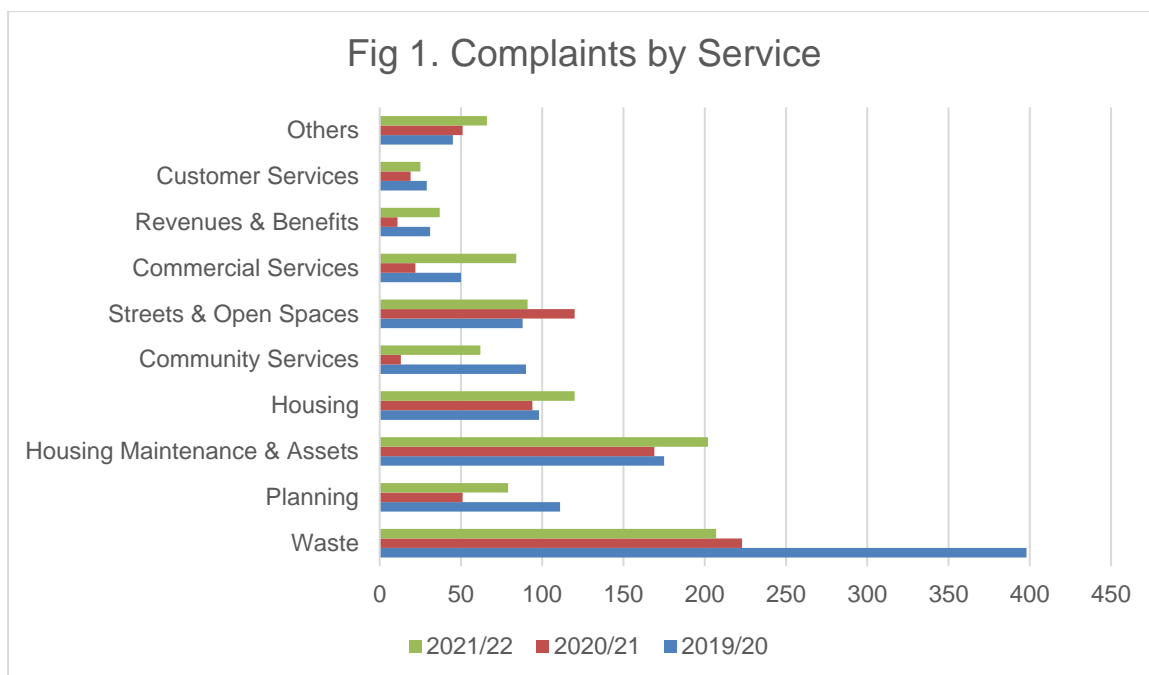
The easing of restrictions relating to the Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly had an impact on the amount of feedback received. As services began to shift back to a normal, or as normal as possible service offering, complaints were likely to increase.

Community Services saw a sharp increase from 13 complaints in 2020-21 to 79 this year. This is largely because following the easing of restrictions, venues were opened up again, and events took place. The data supports this by showing the majority of this increase were complaints relating to show issues at the Corn Exchange, or other members of the audience at shows.

Customer Services reopened the Customer Service Centre to customers and have seen a small increase. The CSC have offered a new face-to-face service offering with an emphasis on encouraging customers to use digital options to self-serve, and as such have seen a reduction in the number of face-to-face appointments.

The Streets & Open Spaces team saw an increase in the use of public parks and spaces, which inevitably meant that the Street Cleansing operatives saw their workloads increase as they had to deal with high volumes of littering and an increase in domestic fly tipping across the city. This is also shown in the data as Street Cleansing was the highest area of complaint for the Streets & Open Spaces service with 36 complaints.

However, the ongoing impact of Covid on staff availability, particularly in front-line services such as housing repairs, does appear to have contributed to services finding it hard to meet customer expectations in some instances.



	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Others	45	51	66
Customer Services	29	19	25
Revenues & Benefits	31	11	37
Commercial Services	50	22	84
Streets & Open Spaces	88	120	91
Community Services	90	13	62
Housing	98	94	120
Housing Maintenance	175	169	202
Planning	111	51	79
Waste	398	223	207

### Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

12 complaints were made to the Local Government Ombudsman. Of these, six were progressed to be investigated by the LGO, and of those, three were upheld. (See pages 37-40 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 Service contacts with the City Council - overview & context**

During 2021-22 over 245,000 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 63,000 contacts were handled by the Council's 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 7,475 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 2021-22**

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
2021-22	92%	6%	<1%	1-2%
2020-21	93%	6%	0%	1%
2019-20	89%	8%	2%	1%

The majority of complaints were received via a digital channel, predominantly via customers submitting their complaints themselves. 82% 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 from 79% last year.

The face-to-face customer service offering continued to be an appointment-only emergency service early in the year, but then moved to a service which assisted customers to self-serve using digital options. Four complaints were submitted using this contact method.

## Compliments

In 2021-22 the Council received 131 compliments across all services via Complaints Tracker, which is an increase of 34 (35%) compared to 2020-21.

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

Officers are encouraged during training to formally record compliments as well as complaints, as managers had mentioned more than once that the number of compliments formally recorded was lower than expected.



## GovMetric - Customer Feedback System

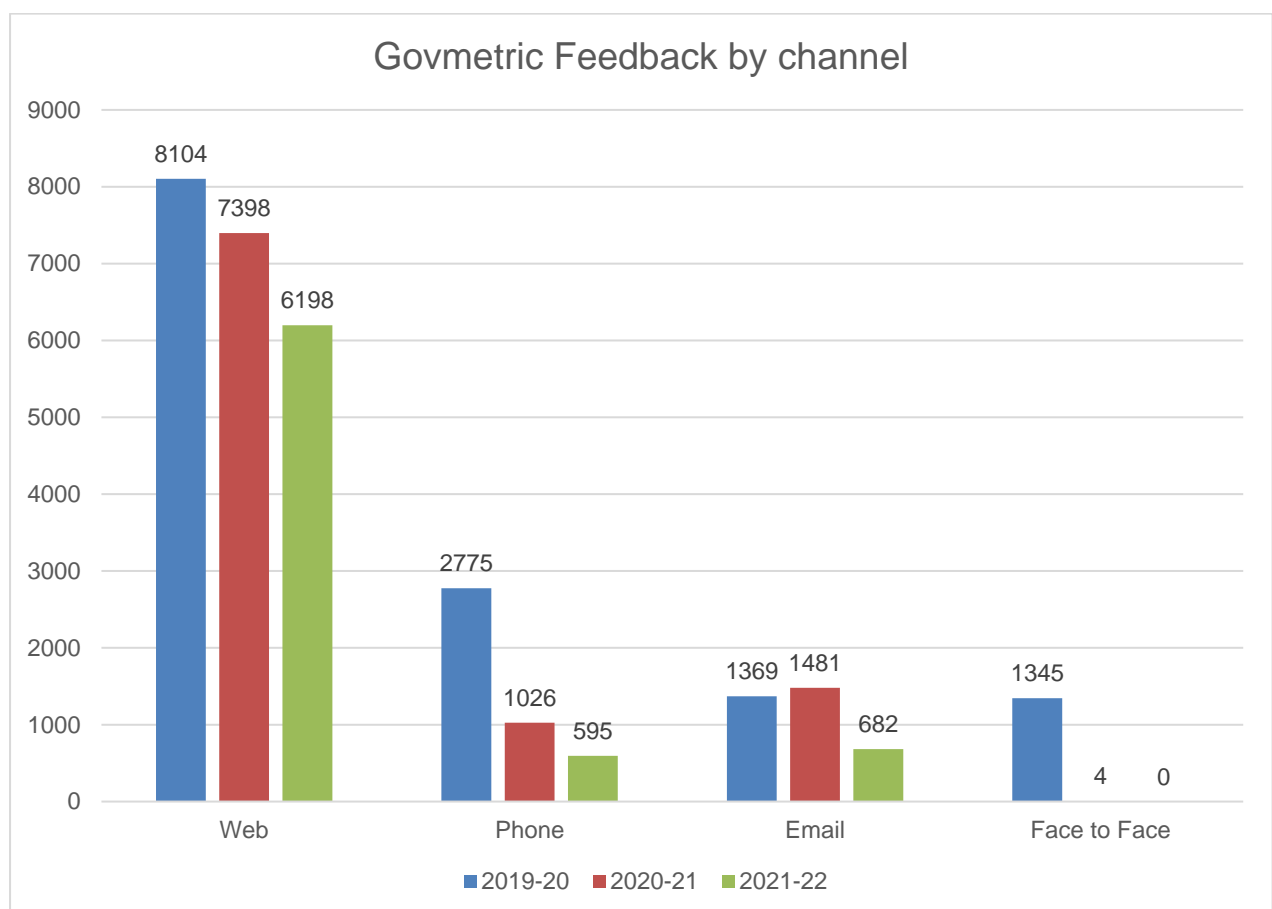
GovMetric was introduced by Customer Services as a way in which to gather customer feedback from a variety of different channels. This feedback tool allows us to review and track how customer feedback is submitted by the selection of three smiley faces: good, average or poor.

Once they have chosen their preferred smiley, the customer can then provide more specifics about their feedback, including the service area and have 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 2019-2022

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, 2019 – 2022

Channel	Date	Total	Good %	Average %	Poor %
Phone	2021-22	595	90%	8%	2%
	2020-21	1026	92%	7%	2%
	2019-20	2775	29%	9%	2%
Face to Face	2021-22	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2020-21	4	25%	50%	25%
	2019-20	1345	77%	10%	13%
Email	2021-22	682	54%	20%	26%
	2020-21	1481	57%	21%	22%
	2019-20	1369	61%	16%	22%
Web	2021-22	6198	42%	12%	46%
	2020-21	7398	49%	11%	40%
	2019-20	8104	45%	13%	42%

## GovMetric Feedback received at the Customer Service Centre

Feedback via Govmetric has decreased significantly in 2021-2022 for a number of reasons, reception services being closed for a period of the year, reduced visits by customers and Advisors managing multiple changes in processes and high numbers of systems has resulted in a reduction in the number of customers being transferred for feedback.

A review of Govmetric as a mechanism for customer feedback is being undertaken in 2022-2023 with the aim of improving the level and quality of customer satisfaction Cambridge City Council receives in the future.

## GovMetric Feedback received via the council's website

*Comments from Esther Pickard, Digital & Web 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. The comments have only just started to be received again by the web team, after a long gap without them.

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 previous years. The total figure in the first column is the sum of Stage 1 and 2 complaints.

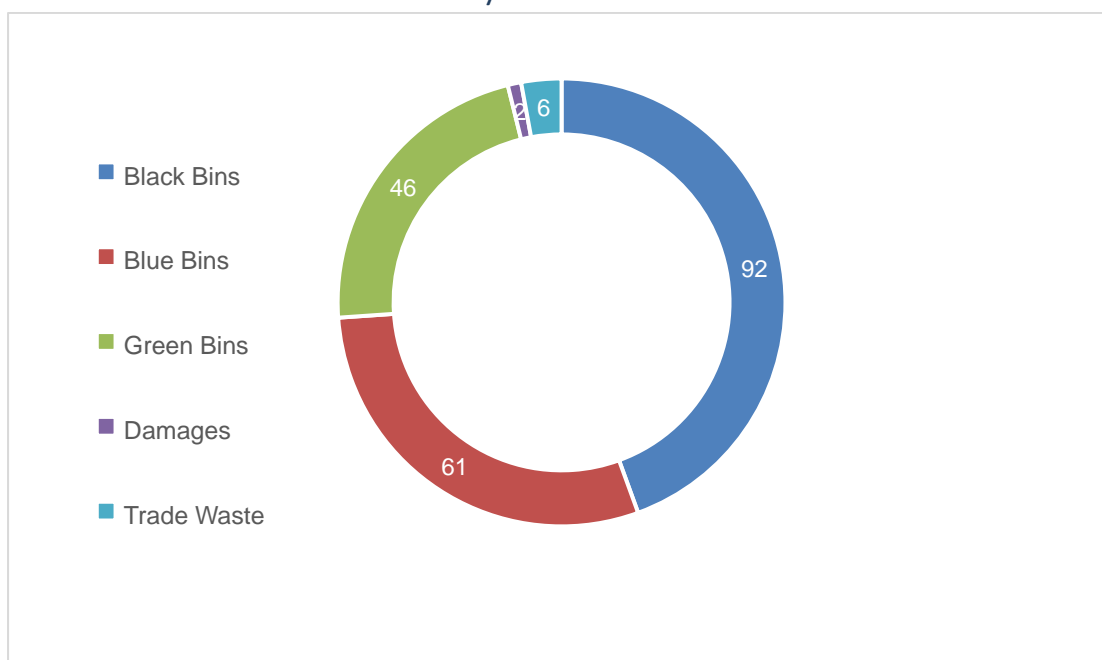
Complaints by sub-service are identified in the pie chart, this is how a service is broken down into the individual service request areas within. The bar graph displays resolution themes, or where these themes are too diffused and a trend cannot be identified, the bars will display root causes.

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).

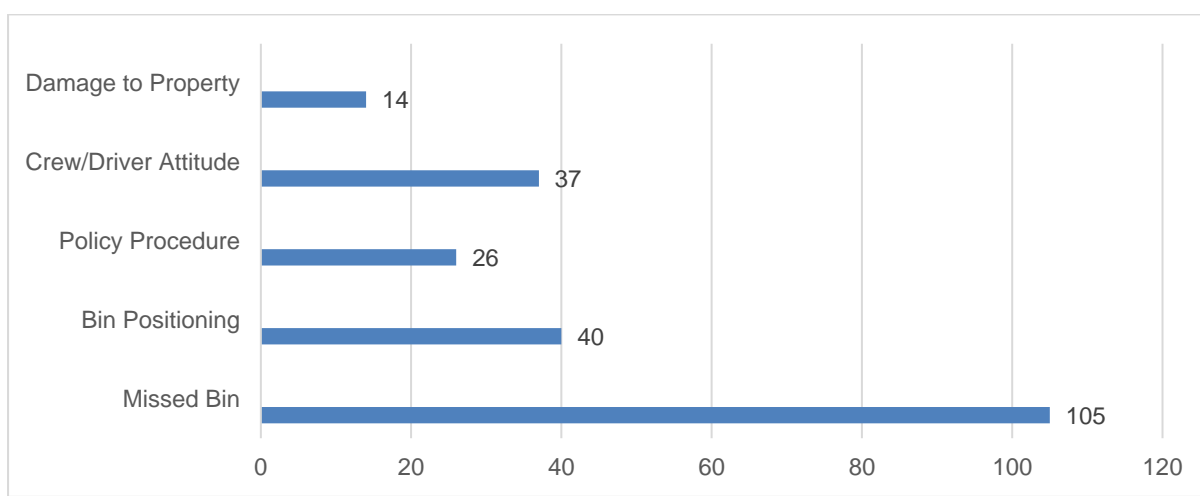
## Cambridge City Council services as delivered by Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service

Waste	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2021-22	207	10	76%	5	16
2020-21	223	12	83%	1	4
2019-20	398	16	82%	9	13

### Waste Services: Cases by sub-service



### Waste Services: Resolution Theme



## Waste - Service Comments

### ***From Bode Esan, Head of Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service:***

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The Shared Waste Service undertakes in the region 690,000 collections per month, collecting 3 bins per household per fortnight, or approximately 396,000 bin collections per month within the City. The service has maintained the number of successful collections to over 99.72%

In 2021-22 the service recorded 10,386 bins in the city that were not collected on schedule for various reasons – at least 6,021 of these were outside the control of the service such as blocked roads, vehicle breakdowns, bad weather, etc. However, these are normally collected within 24 hours.

The total number of recorded complaints for the service (including complaints relating to bin collections) fell from 223 in 2020-21 to 207 in 2021-202. This was achieved against the continued pressures of Covid-19 which led to staff shortages and service suspensions. The impact of covid has continued into 2021-22 but the number of complaints has continued to drop and indeed the number of compliments has risen. We feel that some residents are increasingly appreciative of the efforts we have made to keep the services running.

The service has worked hard to reduce the number of complaints and increase the speed in resolving comments over the last year, but the rate of response within time has dropped. This is a reflection on the pressure and workload of service managers during the times of disruption.

The most common complaint is about missed collections which is the same picture as last year, with a slight increase. Given the service disruption to green bin collections during the first quarter of the year as a result of prioritising statutory/mandatory collection of blue and black bins over garden waste collections (non-statutory) during a period of acute resources shortage due to sickness), holiday and continued challenges with recruiting, and how quickly the change happened this is perhaps not surprising, with some residents perhaps not fully understanding the severity of the impact on the service - despite the impact on green bins collections, majority of the complaints related to black bins, as there seems to be less tolerance for missed collections relating to this service, than others.

The background context to the above is twofold:

The number of complaints responded to in target in 21-22 was down from 83% to 76% with figures from Q3 (Oct to Dec) bringing the overall average figure down – this lower response rate would likely have been due to the vacant Team Leader position (key staff member that addresses complaints), which was not filled until the end of December 2021, further compounded by the extremely busy Christmas period and high levels of sickness due to COVID peak (i.e. other Team Managers were out providing cover for sick crew members on the day-to-day services delivery);

Overall, year 21-22 has been especially challenging in terms of manpower resources – the service has continued to struggle to fill HGV (refuse truck) driver and loader vacancies (exacerbated by the competition from the private sector due to the nationwide HGV driver shortage post-Brexit), in addition to facing high levels of staff absences due to sickness (COVID and other illness).

As an example, in the middle of March 2022, there were a total of 48 absences (out of the total 150 operatives and Team Leaders), due to vacancies, sickness and annual leave.

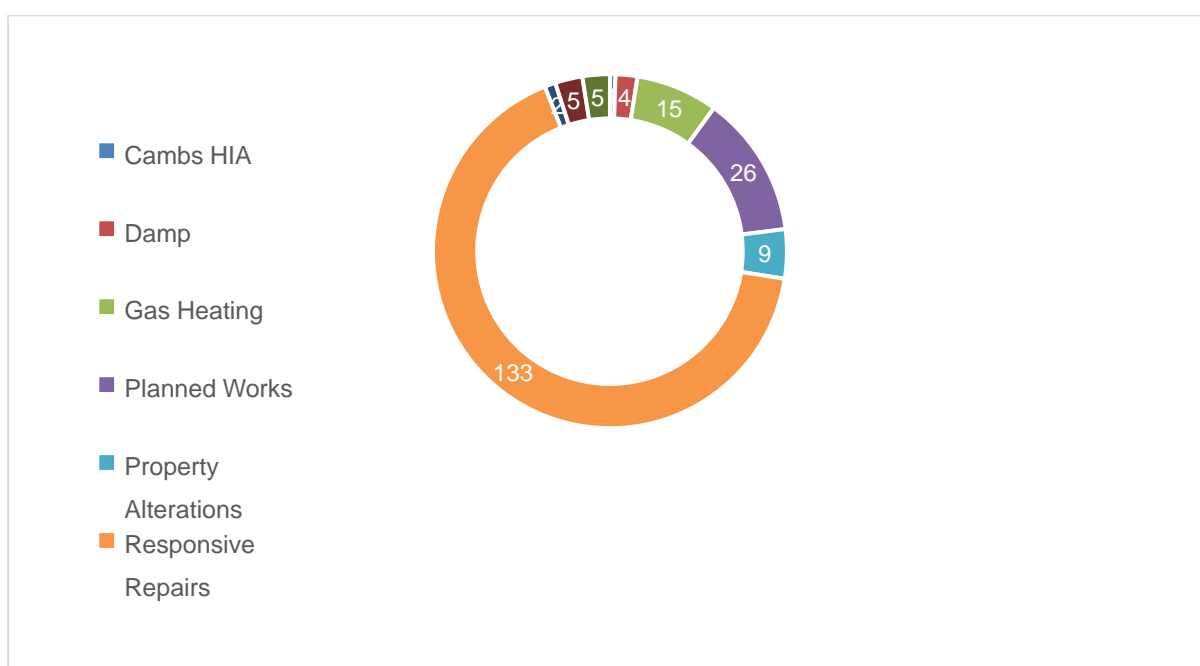
GCWS regularly gathers data relating to collections and reviews the missed collection reports monthly to identify trends in the service and repeated instances to stop issues as early as possible and keep our collection rates high.

Furthermore, the service will undertake more regular reviews of complaints data and feedback such as quarterly reporting rather than yearly: this will inform any changes to procedures, policies or operations that can be put in place to avoid the risk of a repeated error and result in enhanced management of complaints handling on a day-to-day basis.

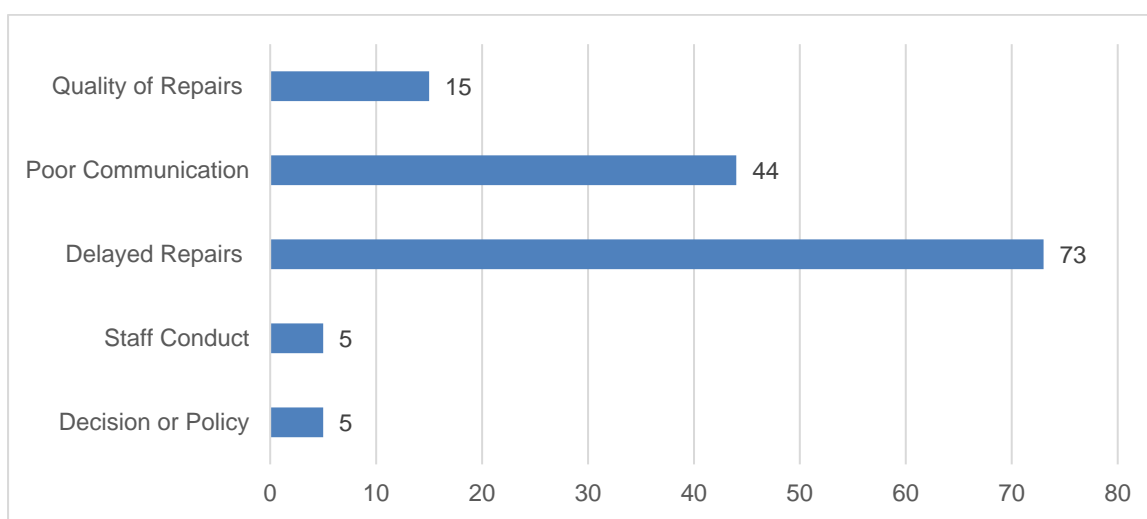
## Housing Maintenance & Assets

Waste	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2021-22	202	10	78%	13	18
2020-21	169	12	86%	12	18
2019-20	175	14	95%	11	12

### Housing Maintenance: Cases by sub-service



### Housing Maintenance: Resolution Theme



## Housing Assets & Maintenance - Service Comments

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

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The Housing Assets and Maintenance Team are responsible for the repair and maintenance of over 7,000 houses, 20 administrative buildings, 14 car parks and 144 commercial properties. During the year 21/22 we completed over 12,800 responsive repairs, 7,700 planned maintenance jobs, 6,000 planned maintenance service inspections and repair work to relet almost 300 properties. Therefore, we received complaints for 0.75% of the jobs we completed, which demonstrates that we get things right far more often than we get it wrong. The important thing is to learn from the complaints. To this end, over the next few months, we will be working with the Our Cambridge team to see where we can make improvements to our processes and systems to enable us to provide the best possible customer experience. In doing this we will be reviewing our complaints to enable us to learn where things have not worked for the customer.

The number of complaints received for the sub-service areas remained steady in all service areas except the increased number of complaints in responsive repairs.

Complaints about the quality of repairs and decision/policy have reduced but the number relating to delayed repairs and poor communication has risen. Delays increased following the changes to the level of repairs and planned works we were able to undertake during certain times in the past year due to the pandemic. This resulted in a back log of work that we have been working through which may have caused some of our tenants a level of frustration. The level of service we have been able to provide has also been impacted at times with staff being unavailable for work due to covid related illness and/or isolation requirements.

I advised in last year's report that we had introduced the Tenant Liaison Officer (TLO) role, and that one of their objectives was to study the complaints made about poor communication and look for procedural improvement where possible. The priority we intended to attach to this work was affected by the previous Operations Manager leaving the organisation in April 2021. From April 2021 to January 2022 the TLO was dealing with the entire Operations team's complaints so has not been able to give communications complaints the focus intended. This is reflected in the volume of complaints recorded under the resolution theme for communications. Now we have appointed to the role of Operations Manager this task will have further priority for the TLO again this year.

Another area of work I advised of last year was the TLO's analysis of those complaints that had been escalated to stage 2. The aim was to establish some practical learning that could be provided to staff that deal with complaints at stage 1 to reduce escalation and resolve earlier for the customer. There has been an improvement here, there has been a reduction in the proportion of complaints escalated to stage 2.

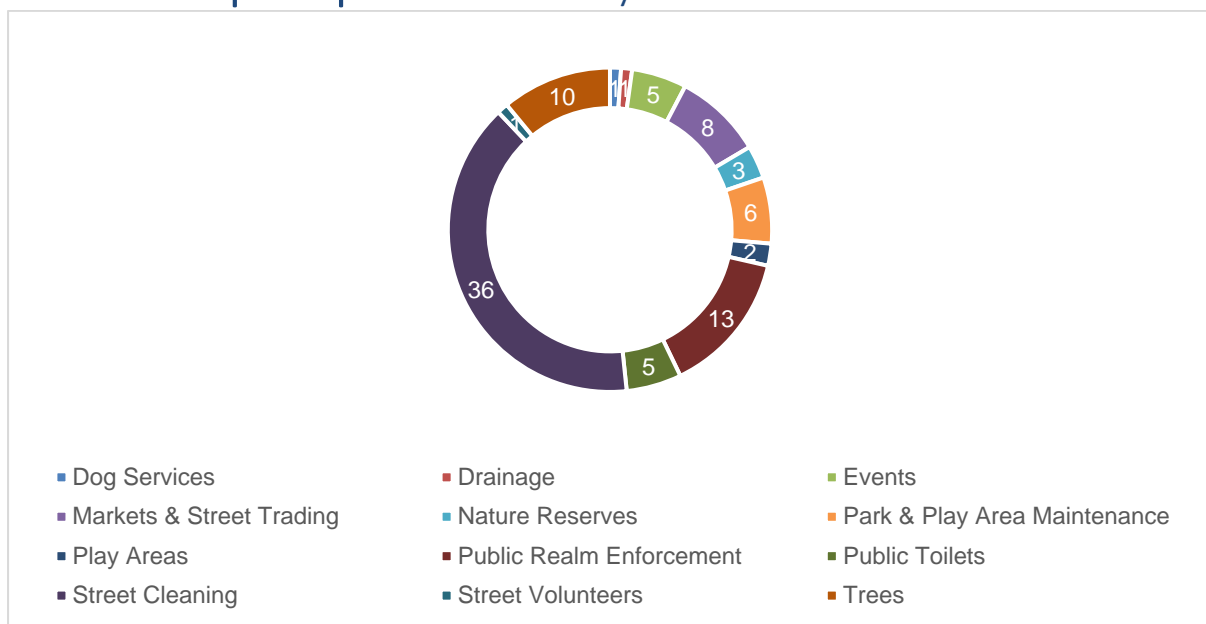
The percentage of complaints completed within target has reduced slightly for 2021/22, as there were some complaints raised during the year that remained open at year end. Where extensions have been obtained by the case owner, these are not included within the cases resolved on target. As a service we will complete refresher training with all case owners on the process of investigating complaints and requesting a target date extension when these investigations and resolutions require them.



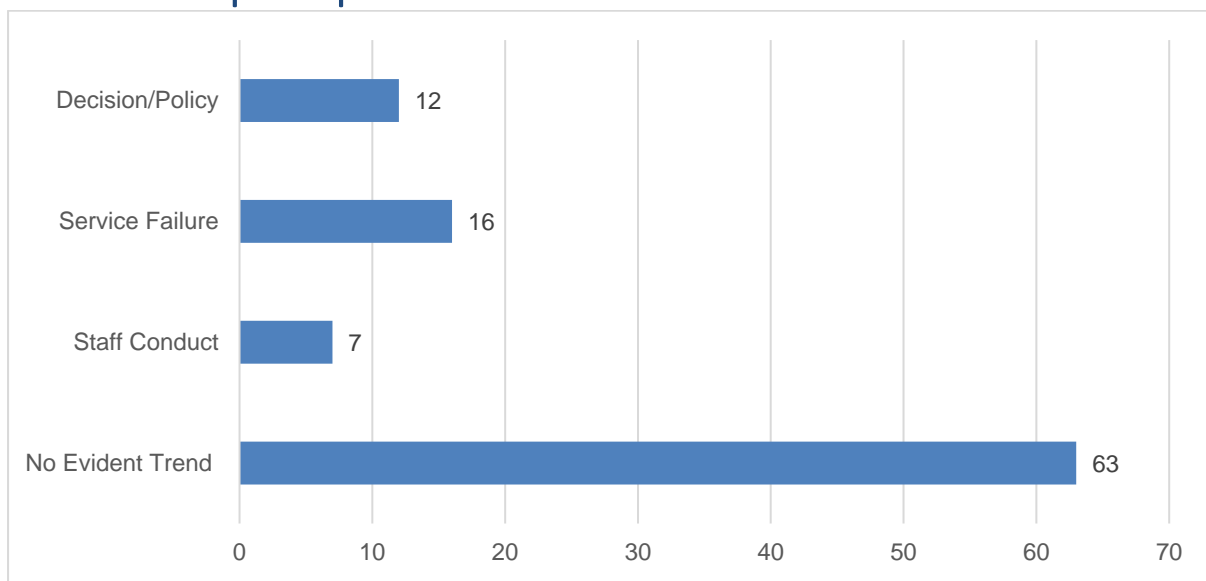
## Environmental Services – Streets & Open Spaces

Streets & Open Spaces	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2021-22	91	6	85%	4	16
2020-21	120	3	85%	1	21
2019-20	88	6	76%	9	37

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



### Streets & Open Spaces: Resolution Themes



## Streets & Open Spaces - Service Comments

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

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**Our 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 (c33,000), play areas (c107); public toilets (c13), allotments (c26) and 7 day per week market and street trading pitches; and providing daily cleansing, grounds maintenance and street enforcement services.

Despite the continuing impacts of the COVID pandemic on the city, the S&OS service has been able to maintain a near 'business as usual' operation.

As a result of people's desire to get out and enjoy our open spaces during and after the COVID pandemic (once restrictions were lifted), we have seen a significant increase in community use and enjoyment of our fantastic parks and green spaces for informal leisure and recreation. On the negative side, our Street Cleansing service has had to deal with high volumes of seasonal littering, especially from summer evening and night-time use of the main city parks, such as Jesus Green, and also year-round high volumes of predominantly domestic fly tipping across the city.

Despite the afore-mentioned operational management challenges brought about by the pandemic, the S&OS service received a total of 91 complaints (compared to 120 in 2020/21). Of these 91 cases, the areas of service with significantly high case numbers were: Street Cleansing (including Grounds Maintenance): 36 (2020/21 – 21); Trees: 10 (2020/21 – 17) and Public Realm Enforcement: 13 (2020/21 – 16). The remaining areas of service complaint each accounted for 6 or less cases. It is also worth noting that the S&OS service has been able to sustain a consistently high 'Complaints in Target' response rate of 85%, ie. the same as the previous year.

The service area with the single highest number of cases (36) was the Street Cleansing/ Grounds Maintenance service. This large frontline operational area employs c70 operatives, who provide a 365 day a year, city wide operation, including emptying c1,000 public litter bins each day, cleaning all the city's streets and pavements and cutting the city's open space grass. Given the significant scale of the operation and the afore-mentioned service demands arising from the ongoing pandemic, the 36 complaints equate to less than one case per week and with no particular complaint type or underlying causal theme.

The service area with the second highest number of cases (13) was the Trees 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 c33,000 public trees. In 2021/22 the service responded to 888 tree service requests and carried out 'tree surgery' management on up to 11,000 trees. An analysis of the 13 cases received in 2021/22 shows there was no particular complaint type or underlying causal theme.

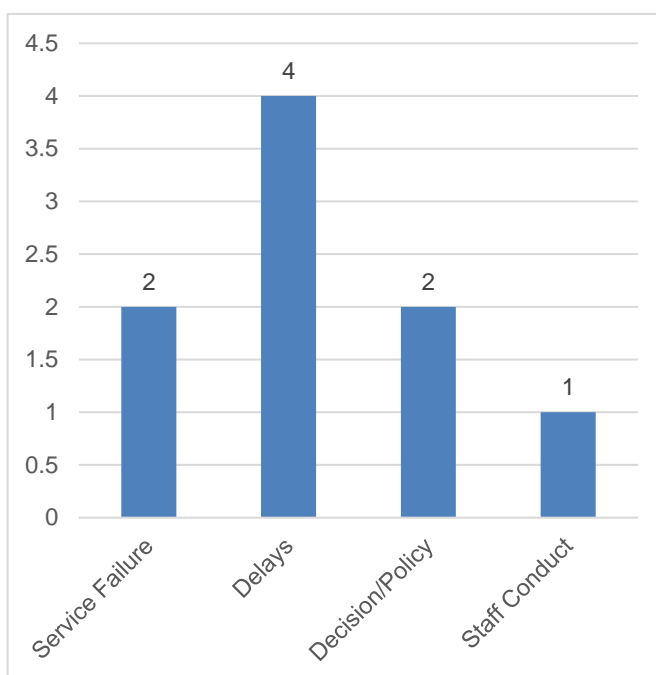
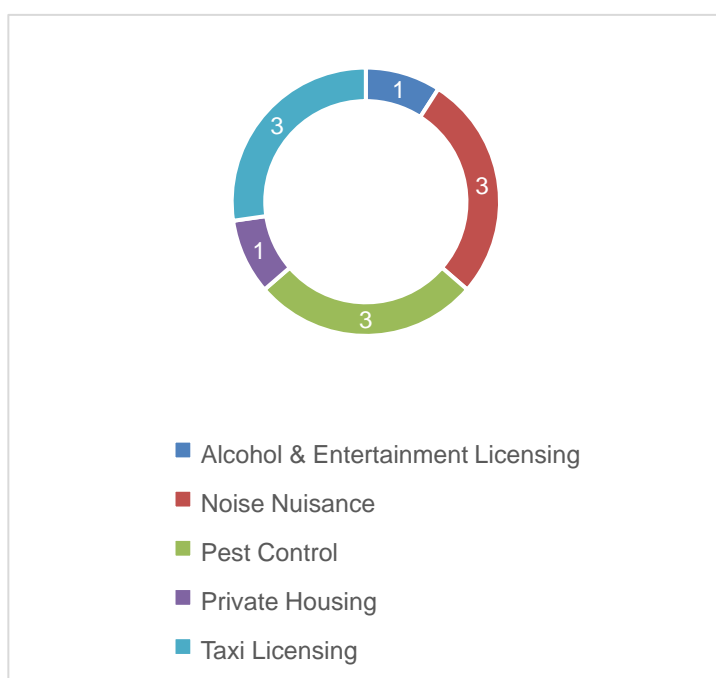
The service area with the third highest number (16) was the Public Realm Enforcement service, which is responsible for investigating and taking enforcement action against environmental crime in the city, including littering, fly tipping and dog fouling. In 2021/22 the service undertook 1807 enforcement investigations and issued 265 fixed penalty notices (FPNs) (2020/21 – 156 FPNs; 2019/20 – 634 FPNs), including 82 for littering (2020/21 – 64; 2019/20 - 371) and 37 for fly tipping (2020/21 – 25; 2019/20 - 72). Although the rates have increased on the previous year's (2020-21), which is in line with the lifting of COVID lockdown restrictions and the return to our pre-COVOD enforcement approach, they are still significantly down on the 2019-20 pre-COVID rates.

Over the year, we have been completing the final stages of deployment of a new digital management system across S&OS. This new system will enable our 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 them 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
2021-22	11	1	73%	2	2
2020-21	17	5	94%	8	2
2019-20	12	3	67%	2	2

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



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

**Environmental Health (EH)** service employs c45 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.

The EH service has continued to lead the Council's response to the COVID 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.

Following the lifting of national lock down restrictions last summer and the recruitment of a dedicated COVID response team (funded through Public Health), the EH service has been able to return to a near 'business as usual' basis; and over the course of 2021/22, has delivered the following:

- 161 Private Sector Housing Inspections
- 269 Food Safety Inspections
- 21 Licensing Inspections
- 625 Pest Control cases
- 1020 Planning consultations
- 1550 Licensing Applications processed
- 2200 Service Requests, including PS housing, food safety, health and safety, licensing, taxis, noise nuisance

In the context of this scale of operation, as outlined above, the EH service received a total of 11 complaints in 2021/22, which is broadly comparable with the previous year's total of 17. Of the 11 cases received, the EH service areas with the highest numbers were respectively: Noise Nuisance (3); Pest Control (3) and Taxi Licensing (3). An analysis of each of the associated cases shows there was no particular complaint type or underlying causal theme.

Although there was a drop in the 'Complaints in Target' response rate to 73% (from 94% the previous year), given the overall low total number of cases (11), this is not considered statistically significant.

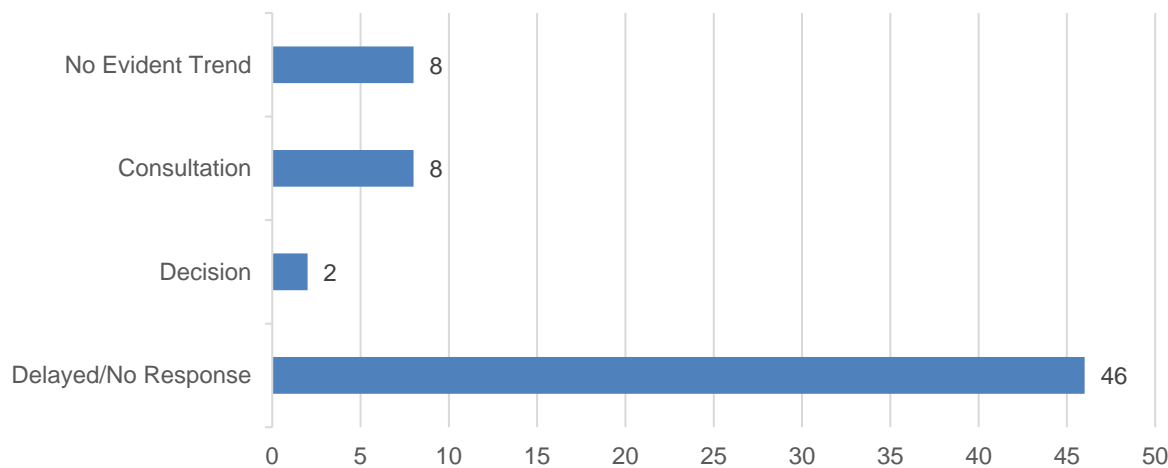
## Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service

Planning Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2021-22	79	14	56%	2	2
2020-21	51	6	22%	-	-
2019-20	111	11	41%	2	-

### Planning: Cases by sub-service



### Planning: Resolution Themes



# Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service - Service Comments

***From Stephen Kelly, Joint Director of Planning***

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Whilst the overall number of complaints received in 2021/22 has increased from 51 to 79 compared to 2020/21, this reflects the fact that the Development Management part of the service was still experiencing high numbers of staff vacancies and recruitment challenges during the first six months of 2021/22 in particular. Since then successful recruitments have taken place into planner and senior planner roles and these new staff have started within the service and had a positive impact on reducing overall workloads. In addition, work is ongoing within the service with our consultants and the DM teams to reduce the outstanding applications backlog and this is progressing positively. The team are prioritising householder applications in the backlog which trigger a lot of the complaints so it is anticipated that all of these measures /outcomes will have a positive impact on reducing the overall number of planning applications-related complaints in the medium-term.

There has been a significant improvement in response times within target compared to 2021-22 from 22% to 56%, and the number responded to within target has more than doubled. This has mainly been due to increased use of a more standardised approach to Stage 1 complaints and the benefit of having had a dedicated complaints resource for a short period. The service has been focusing on reducing response times as a priority and further work will be continuing on this.

The focus of complaints changed slightly compared to 2020/21. Whilst planning applications complaints remain relatively similar with a slight increase from 42 to 48, the number of Policy related complaints has increased from 1 in 2020/21 to 10 in 2021/22. This is very unusual and probably reflects the stage that the Local Plan process has been at during this period, with public consultation happening. In addition, four out of the 10 Policy complaints were from one individual.

Planning enforcement related complaints have also increased from 5 to 18. The increase in the number of planning enforcement complaints, including Stage 2s, is an issue that has been recognised within the planning service and is currently being addressed. As part of the service transformation process, a review of the enforcement service is being carried out by an external consultant. This has recently started. One of the most important objectives of the review is to automate as much of the largely manual existing enforcement processes as possible and to streamline procedures to enable a more responsive enforcement service, including provision of improved information on the website. In addition, the team is looking at ways to improve the provision of updates in relation to ongoing investigations. The operational management of the team has also recently been changed to improve the deployment of enforcement staff. Further changes are likely to come forward as part of the review process.

## Customer Services

Customer Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2021-22	25	-	100%	2	11
2020-21	19	-	89%	6	10
2019-20	29	2	93%	8	29

## Customer Services - Service comments

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

In 2021-2022 Customer services handled in excess of 245,000 contacts via telephone, email and face to face and received 25 complaints, a slight increase from 2020-2021. Complaints continue to be very low in relation to the amount of contacts received, 0.01%. During 2021-2022 the Customer Service team continued to support the rapid 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. In 2021-2022 Reception services were re-opened in a Covid safe way while Advisors continued to support customers to do things digitally, additionally Customer Services worked collaboratively with Estates and Facilities team to launch the online repairs reporting portal, adding a valuable new digital option for tenants. Customers wishing to apply to go on the housing register for Cambridge City Council now have an improved experience after joint working with colleagues in Homelink ensured that actions were taken to reduce the application process. Customers also now receive regular updates on the status of their application reducing unnecessary contacts. The migration to a new contact centre system in February 2022 has opened up more options for customers to receive information about services and to have weblinks to self-service options texted to them without the need to speak to an advisor. The system also has increased business continuity options improving the service we can deliver to customers when there is system downtime.

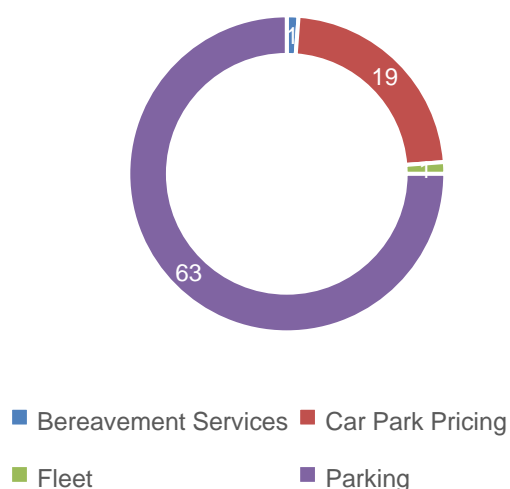
100% of complaints received in Customer Services were responded to within target, and for the second year running the service had no stage 2 complaints. 52% of the complaints received were attributed to advice given/staff conduct. With the level of change happening across the Council in 2021-2022, Advisors found it difficult to keep track of the regular changes to processes and this did result in incorrect advice being given. A review of the impact of repeated and adhoc changes required in customer services as a result of changes made by departments was undertaken. Agreement was reached with services to ensure that, unless critical, changes to processes will take place once a month to allow customer services adequate time to brief advisors and update reference guides. The team also received 11 compliments recorded in tracker over the past year, and 876 positive comments captured via Govmetric, considerably more than the number of complaints raised.



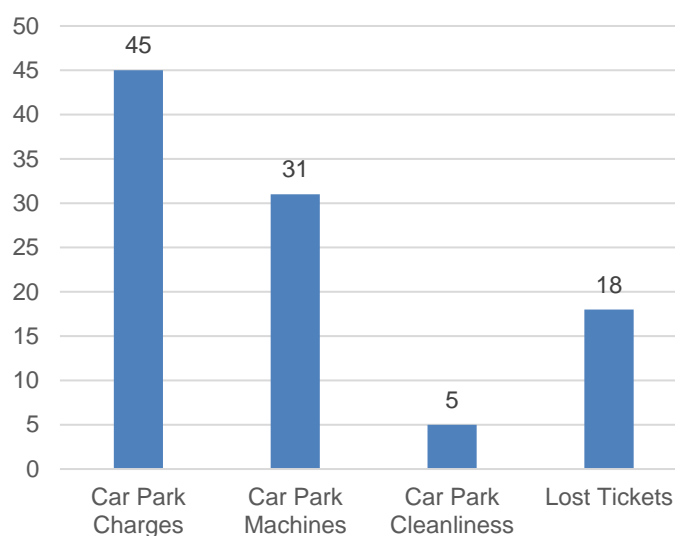
## Commercial Services

Commercial Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2021-22	84	9	94%	1	6
2020-21	22	5	100%	1	1
2019-20	50	2	41%	-	5

### Cases by Sub-Service



### Resolution Theme



## Commercial Services – Service Comments

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

This financial year has seen an increase in complaints from the previous year, although it should be borne in mind that the car parks were effectively closed for significant periods during the lockdowns in 2020/21, and that less usage generates fewer complaints.

All but two of the complaints received by the service are related to car parking. The City Council's car parks are used on around 2.3m occasions in a year. The 84 complaints recorded last year equate to 0.0038% of those visits generating a complaint.

In keeping with previous years, the majority of complaints focus on charging, particularly at the Grand Arcade car park (charges here are similar to those one would expect to pay in central London).

Issues with ticketing machines that generated around 30 complaints in the last year are being addressed by an enhanced machine cleaning and maintenance regime.

The other notable driver for complaints this year has been the more consistent approach to enforcing the lost ticket policy. 6589 people lost their tickets last year. The policy requires them to pay the full charge from 9am. A fraction of people required to pay this charge have lodged a complaint. One case was referred to the Ombudsman but their decision was that the case did not justify an investigation. Lost ticket complaints have begun to fall over the latter part of this financial year, perhaps as users have become more familiar with the approach we adopt.

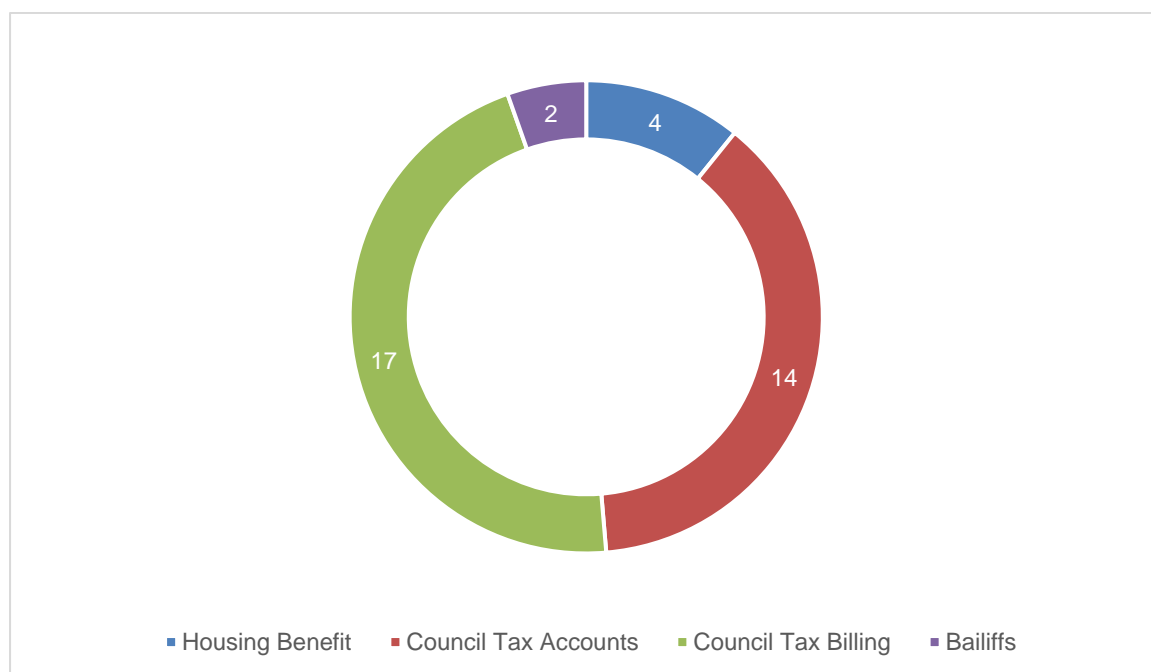
Car Park cleanliness complaints were about Park Street car park which was closed at the end of 2021 and is now being redeveloped.

Five cases were responded to out of target. One of the reasons was related to the level of detail generated by parking equipment reports. The standard team report lacked the level of detail required to by the supplier to solve the problem causing confusion and multiple engagements with the supplier before being resolved (leading to delay in responding to the complainant). The form has been redesigned greatly reducing the solution delivery timeframe.

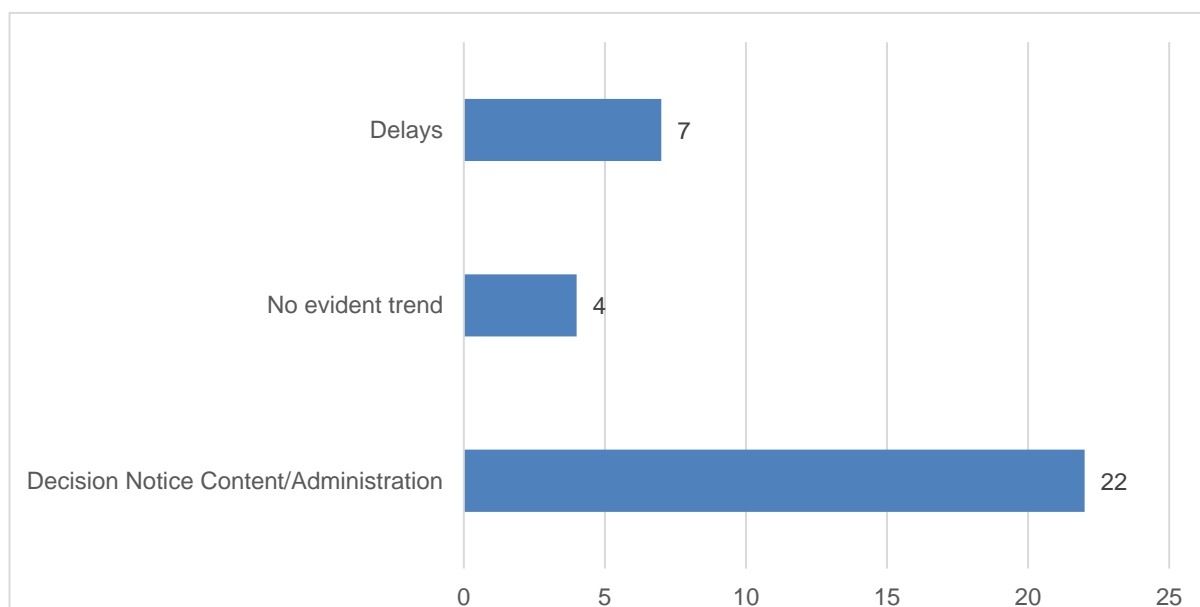
## Revenues & Benefits

Revenues & Benefits	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2021-22	37	2	100%	2	17
2020-21	12	1	100%	-	26
2019-20	31	4	100%	2	18

## Revenues & Benefits: Cases by Sub-Service



## Revenues & Benefits: Resolution Themes



## Revenues & Benefits – Service Comments

### ***From Caroline Ryba, Head of Finance***

During 2021/22, the total number of documents sent from the Revenues and Benefit teams was over 220,000, including:

- For Council Tax: 158,000 documents sent including council tax bills, reminders, final notices and summons.
- For Business Rates: 6,500 documents.
- For Benefits: 47,000 decision notices sent, including
- 5,000 Housing Benefit overpayment letters seeking recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit.

A significant proportion of the documents issued are in pursuance of the recovery of unpaid Council Tax, Business Rates or Housing Benefit, therefore the potential for complaints arising from those activities is high. However, the number of complaints received remains consistently low and demonstrates the sensitive way the team handles this area of work.

Following a pause of some of the Council Tax enforcement processes during 2020/21, recovery action began to get back to normal last year. Inevitably this meant that volumes of recovery notices issued, and cases being taken to Court were significantly higher than in the previous year as we began to catch up with normal level of recovery action. This in turn has led to an uplift in the number of complaints received when compared to the previous year, although the numbers received are similar those received in the years prior to 2020/21. However, given the sheer volume of transactions and changes made to accounts and the increase level of enforcement action the number of complaints remains remarkably low which is testament to the quality of the work being carried out by the team, where issues raised are dealt with quickly before a customer needs to resort to raising formal complaints.

The team continue to remain responsive to complaints with 100% responded to within target again this year.

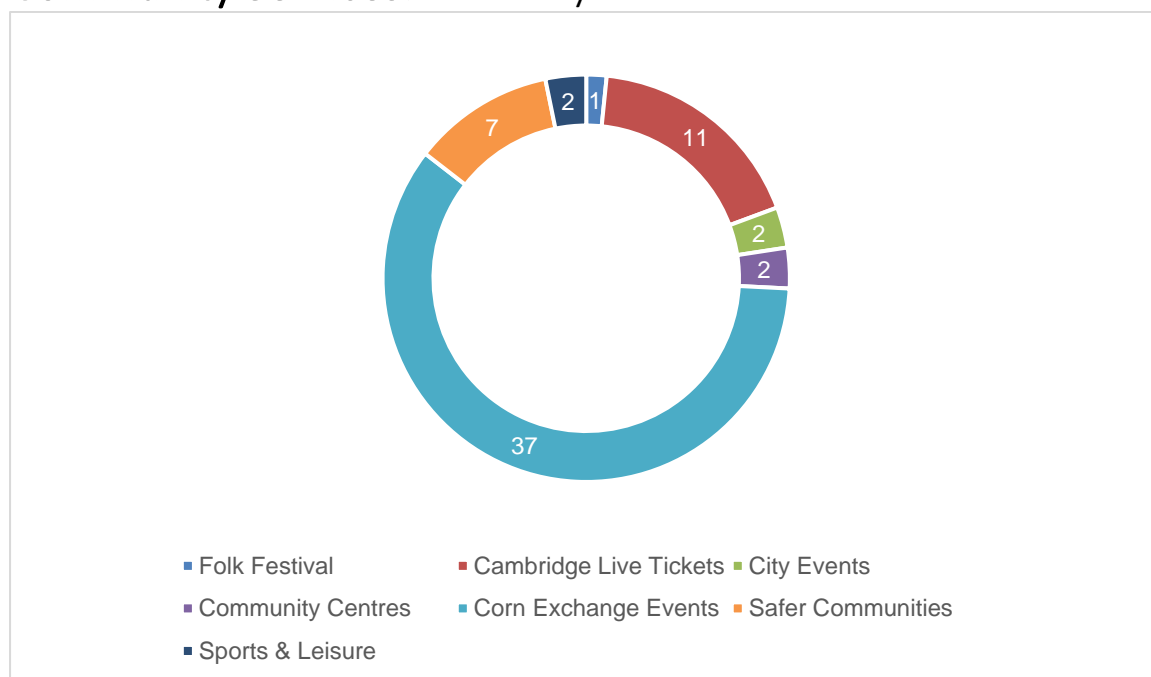
Trends identified are often linked to enforcement procedures which are driven by a statutory process. The team has received complaints from customers unhappy about receiving reminders and summonses for non-payment of council tax, wherever possible we have worked with those customers to find amicable solutions which does mean that few complaints proceed any further than stage 1.

There have been a small number of complaints linked to processing delays which we did experience last year, this was primarily attributed to additional work pressures placed on the teams dealing with Covid Business Grant schemes and the Self-Isolation Grant scheme. We do have systems in place to suppress accounts from recovery action where we have outstanding work and this has meant that complaints about delays are extremely low.

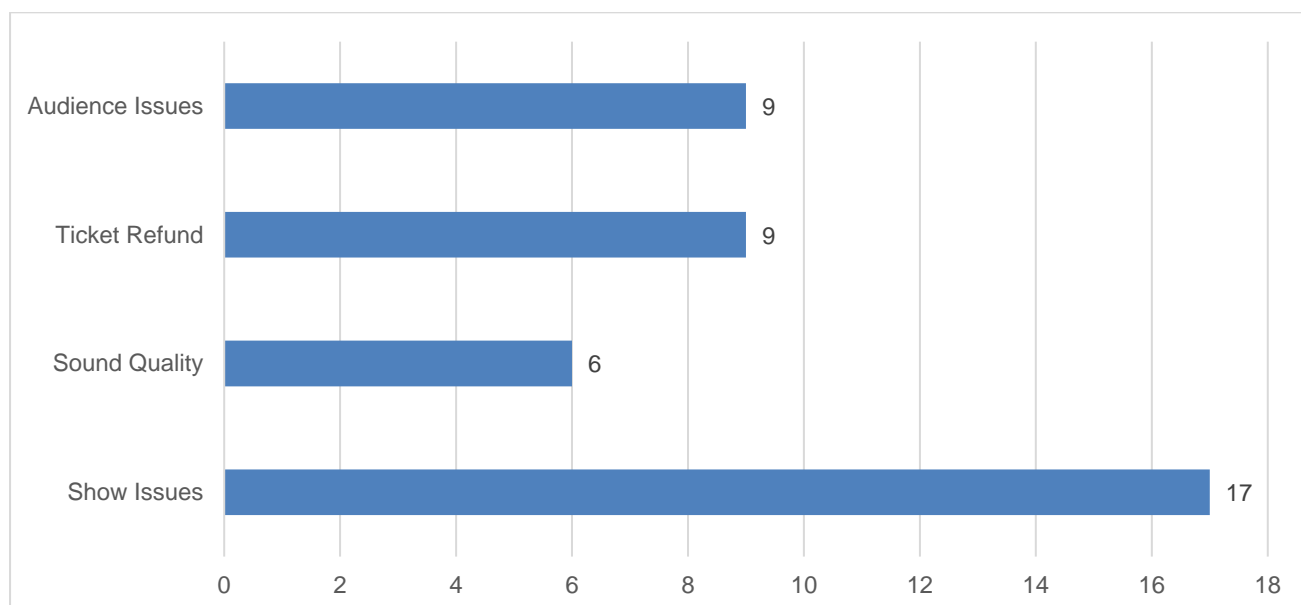
## Community Services

Community Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2021-22	62	2	93%	5	7
2020-21	16	3	81%	1	9
2019-20	90	4	89%	4	15

## Community Services: Cases by Sub-Service



## Community Services: Resolution Themes



## Community Services - Service comments

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

Well over 80% of complaints received by Community Services relate to the cultural and events service. The number of complaints received during the year returned towards pre-covid levels as the Corn Exchange re-opened half way through 2021-22.

#### **Cambridge Corn Exchange and Guildhall Halls:**

Complaints that we receive regarding the Corn Exchange and Guildhall Halls, are dealt with and replied to promptly. Examples of the range of issues mentioned include:

**Queues at the bar** – this was a problem when we first reopened the Corn Exchange after Covid in September. As part of the national recruiting crisis it was very difficult to recruit bar staff and stewards. However, we now have a much larger team to provide a good service to all customers and these concerns have subsided.

**Timings and pricings** – these concerns can arise occasionally. We often need to explain that whilst we are diligent in our care to all our customers, some decisions are outside of our control, two of which are the price promoters set the tickets to be on a hired show, and the performance timings that are advertised from the promoter, which can at times come too late for us to advise customer on the website or via email in advance. We also responded by putting up extra signage on timings within the venue.

**Chilly venue** – this was mentioned again after reopening following Covid. We maximised the ventilation system to use as much fresh air within the venue as part of the covid safety measures. We responded by explaining this on the website and giving people advance warnings on ticket emails.

#### **Community Safety**

With regard to complaints arising in relation to community safety, all related to anti-social behaviour (ASB). The primary theme was residents complaining about the ASB they were experiencing and requesting support from the Council as opposed to a complaint about how the ASB was handled by the team.

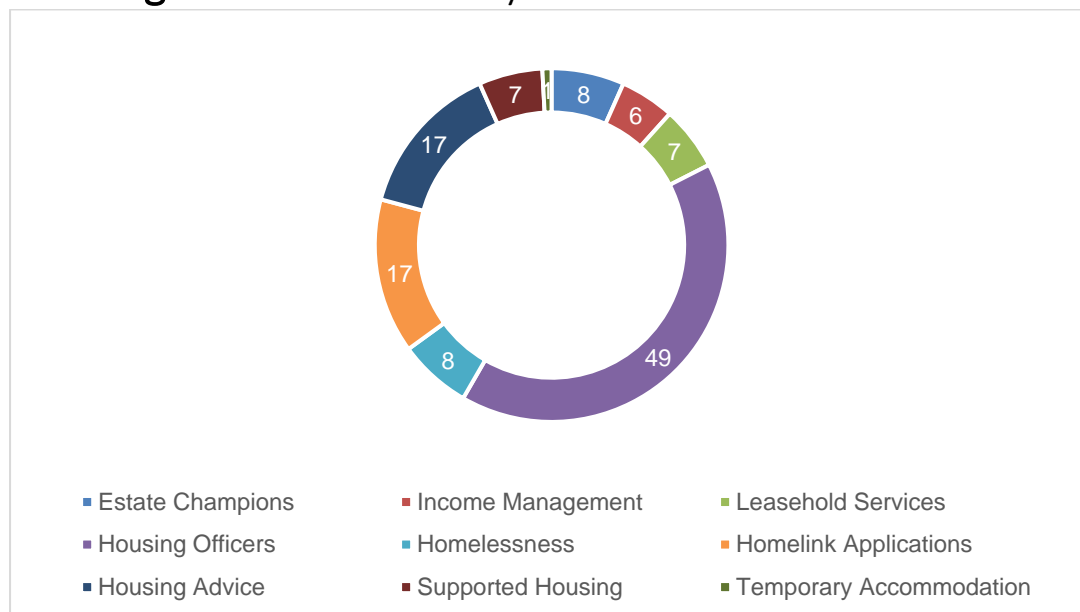
Of those who complained about the service received this was due to the complainant disagreeing with the approach taken by the team. This is common with anti-social behaviour cases as complainants may wish for different action to be taken by the Council, but the Council must be sure that whatever action is pursued is proportionate, in line with evidence and would be accepted by a district Judge.

When working with residents on ASB complaints the Council communicates clearly about the most appropriate action to take and the timescales of enforcement action to help manage expectation of the ASB enforcement process.

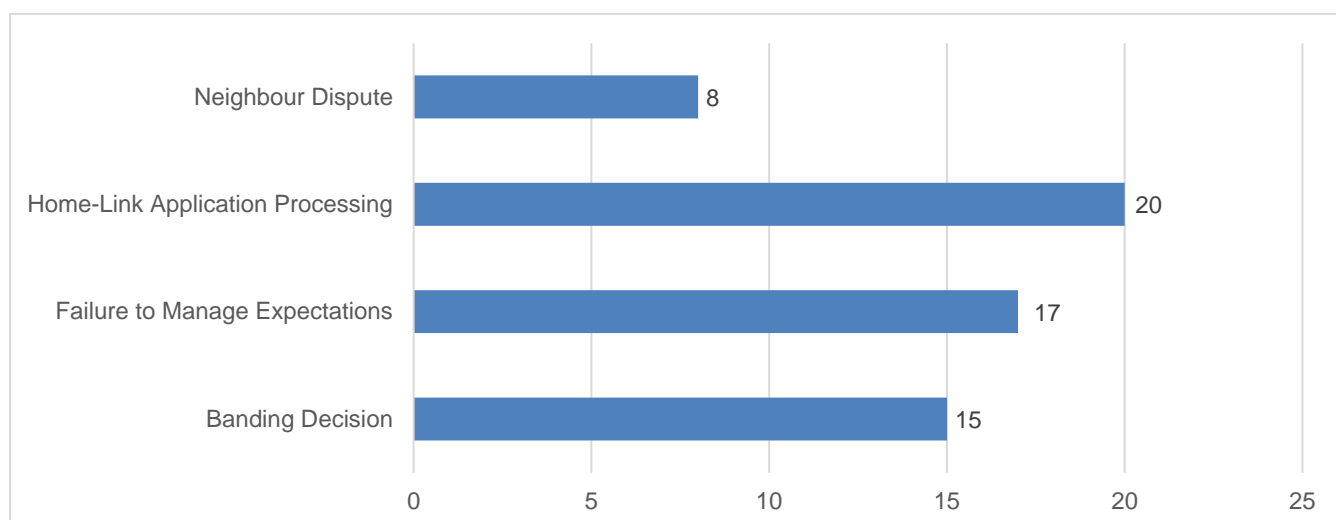
## Housing Services

Housing Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2021-22	120	16	85%	12	28
2020-21	94	10	83%	18	29
2019-20	98	10	85%	14	29

### 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 8,450 properties within the City and has placed 308 households into temporary accommodation during the year. We have also handled 849 homeless applications, had 1,476 new applicants join the Home-Link register and opened 1,159 housing advice cases in the year.

### Analysis

#### City Homes

The top two complaint themes during 2021/22 were as follows:

- ‘failure to manage customer expectations’
- ‘neighbour dispute – behaviour’

The number of neighbourhood disputes dropped significantly from the previous year. This is partly due to the impacts of lockdown in 20-21, which created pressure on neighbour relations. Equally, though, City Homes committed to providing more information to tenants about their rights and responsibilities. This has included the introduction of the new Engagement, Education and Enforcement Officer, a role that has helped reduce instances of items left in communal areas – a frequent source of neighbour dispute – through raising awareness and asking tenants to remove items that breach our *Zero Tolerance Policy*.

A number of complaints relating to a ‘neighbour dispute’ involve fencing or boundary issues. However, when this involves a non-Council owned boundary the Council is not responsible for maintaining or repairing these boundaries and fences.

#### Housing Advice

Last year’s annual report highlighted that Home-Link application processing times were slow. The net effect of this was frustration for customers, missed opportunities to prevent homelessness and high numbers of complaints.

Whilst this was eventually addressed, we failed to address the problem for most of 2021-22. In fact, waiting times from application to the point at which applicants could bid did, at one stage, reach 16-18 weeks. It is no surprise, therefore, that complaints to the Housing Advice Service went up 39% last year. By 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022 processing times have been brought down to 7 weeks and the percentage of complaints for Home-Link in the last two quarters were lower than for the first half of the year.

There were a number of Home-Link complaints that could have potentially been assessed through Home-Link appeals process, rather than through the complaints procedure (which



would have brought the total number of complaints recorded down). This was estimated to be 9 complaints out of a total of 18 for Home-Link and 43 for Housing Advice Service for the year.

## **Learning**

### **City Homes**

In terms of managing customer expectations, the most common root cause is poor communication.

Neighbour disputes – the Engagement, Education officer role is proving to be effective in reducing the number of neighbour disputes. Secondly, as a result of our commitment to creating procedures in response to neighbour disputes, City Homes has increased the use of the anti-social behaviour triage system, working jointly with Community Services and signposting tenants to the Neighbour Resolution Panel. These actions have helped reduce the occurrence of issues being channelled through the complaints process

### **Housing Advice**

Home-Link processing – we have streamlined some processes and taken more of a risk-based approach to verification which seems to have vastly improved performance in this area.

## **Actions**

1. Managing customer expectations is a broad category and Housing Services are reviewing the categorisation of complaints so that we can better understand the root causes
2. Housing Services has a complaint handling code and, in an attempt to address the poor communication theme, officers have been reminded of some of the key principles of the code, such as:
  - Case managers being expected to contact the complainant via telephone, if possible, at the outset to explain the remedy being sought and to help manage expectations
  - Clearly communicating what *will* and *will not* be a matter considered as a complaint, and provide detail around when chasing a service request becomes a complaint
3. Continue to monitor the success of the Neighbour Resolution Panel

4. In relation to boundary or fencing issues City Homes and Estates & Facilities have developed a procedure outlining responsibilities and a process for contacting the freeholder and tenant to explain that the Council cannot enforce any action and if they wish to take the complaint further it must be considered a civil matter.
5. We are developing an *Estates Plan* – One of the aims of developing this plan is to identify any place-specific factors - considering the information gleaned through repeated complaints in a locality and assessing how these could be remedied. This is a longer-term project
6. In 2022-23 Housing Services will be monitoring Home-Link processing times very closely to ensure that these improvements are maintained.

A Band Review Request Form is linked in the Home-Link Welcome Pack and customers are requested to supply appropriate evidence to support the review.

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 one stage one complaint which was 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 three stage one complaints. Two of which were resolved within target. One case remains in progress as it was raised close to the end of the year.

## Human Resources (including Business Support)

Human Resources & Business Support received four stage one complaints, one of which was escalated to stage 2. All were resolved within target.

## Building Control

Building Control received four complaints at stage one, three of which were resolved within target.

## Multi-Service Complaints

Multi-Service Complaints	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target
2021-22	29	5	84%
2020-21	23	3	83%
2019-20	33	3	79%

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 previous years has continued to be effective..

There has been a slight increase in the number of multi-service complaints, which is in line with the overall rise in complaints this year.

As with previous years, the most common areas involved in multi-service complaints are Housing Maintenance & Assets (13), and Housing Services (12). This is to be expected as Housing Maintenance & Assets complaints 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, ten cases were raised relating to issues for authorities or services not provided by the City Council. This is a reduction from 70 in 2020-21, which shows that the guidance we placed on the complaints web page to signpost customers to other authorities if appropriate has reduced the submission of these cases.

## 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 2021-22 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman received 12 complaints relating to Cambridge City Council. Of these, 6 were treated as complaints where a decision was applicable. As a result of the LGO's detailed investigations, 3 were upheld and the remaining cases were not upheld.

The LGSCO were satisfied that 100% of their recommendations from 2021-22 cases were implemented by the Council.

Department	No of Complaints Received	Decision
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	2	2 Closed after initial enquiries
Housing	1	<i>1 Not upheld</i>
Planning & Development	3	<i>1 Not upheld</i> 1 Closed after initial enquiries <b>1 Upheld</b>
Land	1	<b>1 Upheld</b>
Trees	2	2 Closed after initial enquiries
Other	3	1 Closed after initial enquiries <i>1 Not upheld</i> <b>1 Upheld</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3 Upheld</b>

The information above relates to the number of complaints received and considered by the LGSCO. The total number of enquiries made to the Ombudsman will not be known by the Council until the Ombudsman sends the annual letter in July. Once received, this letter will be published to the City Council website alongside this report.

### 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.

## Environment & Regulation

*Complaint: 20 008 600 - 14/10/21*

The complainant claimed that the Council used a rat poison at their home during a pest control appointment in April 2020 which incurred veterinary bills after their dog consumed the poison. The complainant also claims that the Council failed to provide details of the poison used and an emergency contact number causing distress. The complainant initially complained to the Council that:

- The Council was wrong to consider the bait was not harmful to cats or dogs
- There was a risk that the bait would be transferred outside of the trap by rodents and that a small dog could get their nose/tongue into the trap
- There was a lack of information on the box which caused further issues for the vet
- Some bait had been laid loose in the decking of a neighbouring garden which could have been dragged into the complainants garden.

Following their investigation, the Ombudsman found that when the complainant asked for a refund of veterinary bills, the Council should have forwarded this request onto their insurers, rather than attempting to resolve the issue via the Complaints procedure.

### **The LGSCO recommended the following actions**

- Forward the details of the complainants claim of the cost of vets bills to the Council's insurers to be considered for a refund.
- Pay the complainant £100 to acknowledge the time and trouble they were put to because of the fault.

As a result of this complaint, internal guidance was updated to inform complaint investigators that any requests for compensation should be forwarded immediately to the insurers to be considered.

The above actions were completed by the Council in early November 2021.

## Planning Services

*Complaint: 20 008 628 - 24/08/21*

The complainant raised this complaint because they believed that the Council failed to properly consider the impact on their privacy and amenity when it granted planning permission to their neighbour. The complainant further complained that the Council failed to properly exercise its enforcement powers without delay to ensure compliance with the planning permission it had granted. The complainant said this fault has led to significant reduction in their privacy, increasing the overlooking from their neighbours resulting in her family adjusting how they live in and use their home. To address the impact the complainant wanted the Council to use its powers to ensure their neighbour installs obscured glass in one of the windows approved in the planning permission. Further the complainant wanted the Council to use its discretionary powers of enforcement to ensure compliance with the planning permission and to remedy the lost privacy, distress, time, and inconvenience caused to the complainant.

### The LGSCO recommended the following actions

The Council agrees to apologise to the complainant, pay them £3,000 and send them future proposals for further screening for consideration within four weeks of the final decision. The LGSCO are satisfied that all recommendations were complied with.

## Planning Services

### *Complaint: 20 010 732 - 08/07/21*

The complainant complained about the Council's actions in relation to a longstanding dispute about a boundary. They also said that the Council had trespassed and damaged their property. In the complaint to the Ombudsman, the complainant also raised the following issues:

- poor record keeping
- failure to take action and to explain delays
- failure to follow procedures or the law
- poor and delayed communication
- giving misleading information
- failure to investigate complaints and offer a full written response
- failure to act fairly and proportionately with impartiality, courtesy, accountability and transparency
- breaches of data protection
- wrongly labelling him as a persistent complainer

The complainant also claimed that the Council had caused unnecessary and avoidable alarm, distress and inconvenience for which the complainant sought remedial action.

The Ombudsman did not investigate the parts of the complaint relating to the boundary dispute, and the allegation of criminal damage. This is because both of these issues are outside of the LGSCO's jurisdiction and should be determined in court.

When investigating the case, The Ombudsman found fault with the Council's application of its policy for 'Unreasonable and Unreasonably Persistent Complainants'. Although the Council explained to the complainant what the restrictions were, and the reasons for imposing them, it failed to:

- advise how long the restrictions would be in place for; and
- provide the complainant with details of how to request a review of the decision

### The LGSCO recommended the following actions

- Within four weeks of the decision, the Council should write to the complainant to clarify how long the restrictions will be in place and provide details for requesting a review of those restrictions.
- Within six weeks of the decision, 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’.

No remedial action to the complainant was recommended as part of the resolution. Following the decision, the Council reviewed and uploaded its Unreasonable and Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Policy to the City Council website. The complainant was written to in line with this policy to outline the restrictions and how long they would last.

### Number of LGSCO cases, yearly comparisons 2019 – 22

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
2021-22	12	4	3
2020-21	9	4	3
2019-20	13	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 gives advice, and signpost complainants to sources of further information.

### Housing & Social Care Ombudsman

Complaints about the Council’s Housing service can be referred to the Housing & Social Care Ombudsman. In 2021/22, two complaints were referred to the HSCO. One was investigated and not upheld. In the other case the complaint was from a council housing tenant and related to the council’s handling of repairs at the tenant’s property, their request for an adaptation to the bath, concerns around asbestos in the property and reports of vermin in the loft.

The Ombudsman made a determination in accordance with paragraph 54 of the Housing ombudsman scheme there was a service failure on the first three aspects of the complaint but not maladministration in respect of the handling of the reports of vermin.

The housing ombudsman ordered the Council to award compensation to the tenant for the delays in repairs and bath adaptation. The ombudsman also required the Council to offer an apology for its miscommunication with regard to asbestos in the property and to share the most recent asbestos report with the tenant. The Council complied with these requirements and recommendations within the timescales set out by the Ombudsman.



## **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, 2021/22**

During 2021-22 the Council received four complaints about Councillors.

Two complaints were dismissed. One complaint was upheld following an investigation. After consideration by the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person and review by a member sub-committee no further action was taken following an apology by the subject member. The final complaint remains under consideration.

There were nine complaints in 2020-21 and three complaints in 2019/20.

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