



Cambridge City Council

Annual Complaints and Feedback Report 2022 - 23

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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Report, which gives an overview of the complaints the Council has received and how we have dealt with them (though we do not publish names or other personal details of people who have complained).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) or Housing Ombudsman** is the final stage - the person affected must have gone through our internal complaints process before going to the LGO or Housing Ombudsman for an independent review.

Complaints to Cambridge City Council in 2021-22: summary

Total number of complaints received

In 2022-23, the total number of complaints received was 886, which is a decrease of 87 cases (9%) from the previous year's total of 973.

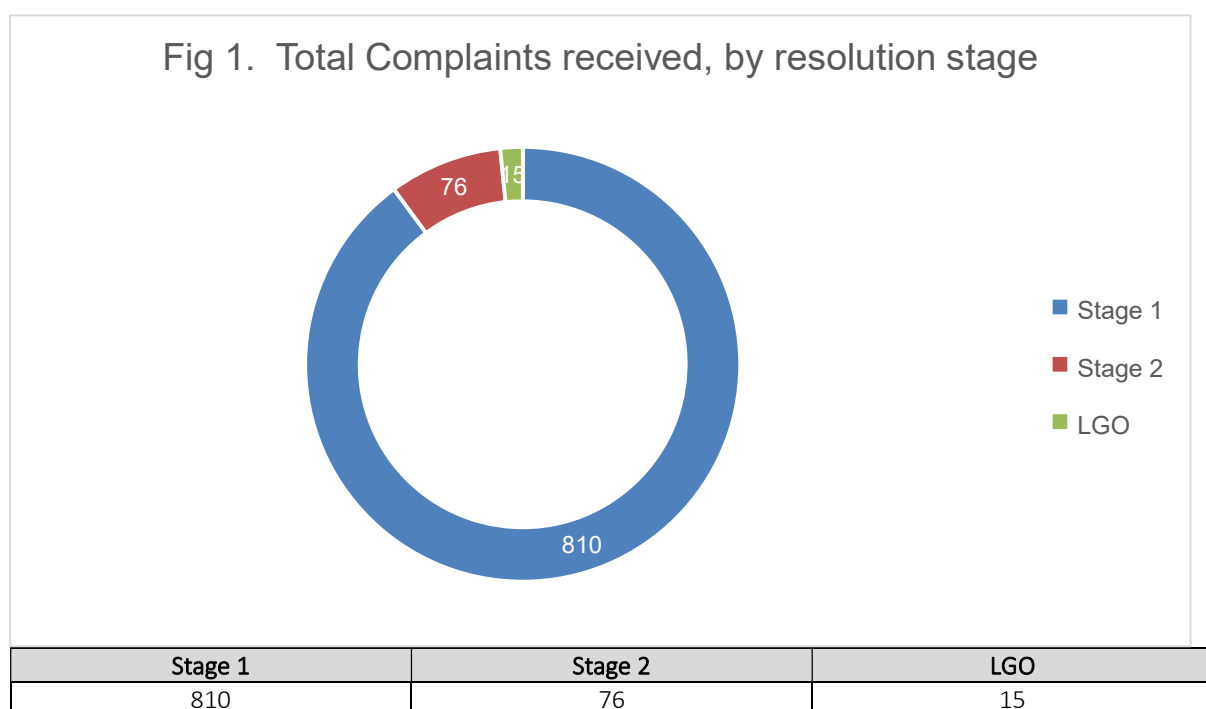
Proportion resolved at stage 1 and stage 2

Of those 886 complaints, 93% were resolved successfully at the first stage without need for escalation. This compares with 91% in 2021-22, and 93% in 2020-21.

76 complaints were escalated to stage two, which is 7 fewer than the 83 in the previous year. See Fig 1.

Proportion resolved within the target timescale

Across all complaints submitted, 77% were resolved within the target time of ten working days. This represents a decrease on recent years, where 88% were responded to within time in 2021-22, and 85% in 2020-21. Reasons for this are outlined in individual service comments later in this report.

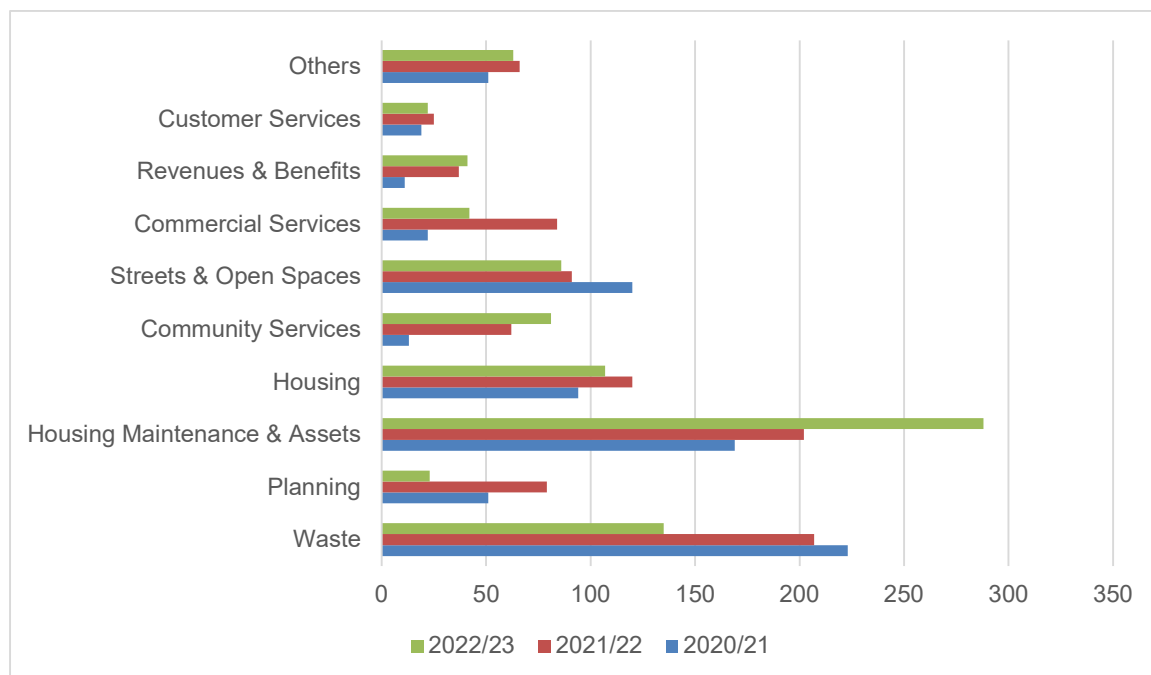


Overview of complaint trends

288 (33%) of all complaints received by the Council were for the Housing Maintenance & Assets service. This is an increase from 202 complaints in the previous year. The main contributor to this was when the service moved to a new gas maintenance contractor, and there were initial resourcing issues with the contractor which resulted in an influx of cases.

Other services saw the number of complaints received decrease from last year. Complaints for Waste services reduced from 207 in 2021/22, to 135 in 2022-23. Commercial Services also saw a 50% reduction in complaints from 84 to 42.

Customer Services, Streets & Open Spaces and Planning also saw smaller reductions in complaints compared to the previous year. The only other service to see a significant increase in cases received was Community Services, which includes Cultural Services. The increases in Community Services complaints came from an increase in cases related to events at the Corn Exchange. [add explanation – to come from Frances A]



Service	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Others	51	66	61
Customer Services	19	25	22
Revenues & Benefits	11	37	41
Commercial Services	22	84	42
Streets & Open Spaces	120	91	86
Community Services	13	62	81
Housing	94	120	107
Housing Maintenance	169	202	288
Planning	51	79	23
Waste	223	207	135

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and Housing Ombudsman

15 complaints were made to the Local Government Ombudsman. Of these, six were progressed to be investigated by the LGO, and of those, five were upheld. (See pages 33-36 of this report for more detail). At time of writing there are no decision summaries listed on the Housing Ombudsman website.

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.

Persistent and Unreasonably Persistent Complainants

In last year's report we highlighted that as a result of a complaint to the LGSCO, it was necessary to update our Persistent and Unreasonably Persistent Complainants policy, and consequently review our internal process for managing persistent complainants. This was developed internally and went live in January 2023. So far two persistent complainants have been identified and restrictions applied on their contact with the Council using this process.

Reporting on complaints about Council Policy

There is a clear difference between complaints about a policy, and complaints about how a policy is applied. However, currently there is not a method in place for handling, or differentiating, complaints about a policy from standard complaints. Current practise is that complaints about policies are recorded in the same way that we record a complaint about it's application. Following a constructive discussion at a Senior Management meeting, the Business & Development Team are working on a process for recording and handling policy complaints.

LGSCO Complaint Handling Code

Our complaints handling guidance is based upon the code laid out by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. In November 2022 the LGSCO announced that they would be publishing a joint handling code alongside the Housing Ombudsman. This code is due to be published in late 2023, with the aim to begin using it as standard practice in casework from April 1 2024.

Whilst we will need to review our guidance in line with this new handling code, it is expected that the impact will be limited. This is because our guidance is drawn from the LGSCO handling code, and each year we complete and publish a self-assessment of our procedure from the Housing Ombudsman to ensure we are compliant with their expectations.

Senior Management Restructure

Following the restructure of the Senior Management Team, a review of the Council's complaints policy and internal guidance related to complaint handling was undertaken. Under the revised policy stage 2 cases will now be handled by a member of the Corporate Management Team.

How complaints were received

Year	Email	Web	Telephone	Face to Face	Letter
2022-23	8%	84%	6%	<1%	1%
2021-22	10%	82%	6%	<1%	1-2%
2020-21	13%	80%	6%	0%	1%

The majority of complaints were received via a digital channel, predominantly via customers submitting their complaints themselves. 84% 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 82% last year.

The face-to-face customer service offering continued to assist customers to self-serve using digital options. Four complaints were submitted using this contact method.

Compliments

In 2022-23 the Council received 82 compliments across all services via Complaints Tracker, which is a decrease of 49 (35%) compared to 2021-22.

However some frontline services found that compliments were received directly to operatives or officers from residents. These have been included in the service-by-service summaries where available.

Housing Maintenance & Assets, Streets & Open Spaces, Housing Services and Waste Services received the highest number of compliments, with the majority relating to helpful staff members.

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. This is evidenced by only four compliments being formally

registered on the case monitoring system, but a larger amount being received directly by Waste operatives.

GovMetric - Customer Feedback System

In 2022-23 Customer Services reviewed the use of the Govmetric customer feedback system. The review determined that that the volume of data being received was not significant enough to justify the cost, therefore, we opted not to renew the contract for a further year.

However, recognising the importance of customer feedback, the Business & Development team within Customer Services completed a piece of work to design our own in-house feedback system across all channels. The system is live for email and face to face channels, with telephone options anticipated by Q3 2023-24. Customers can opt into leaving feedback under the new system, without needing action from advisors and the questions can easily be changed in house to gather targeted feedback.

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.

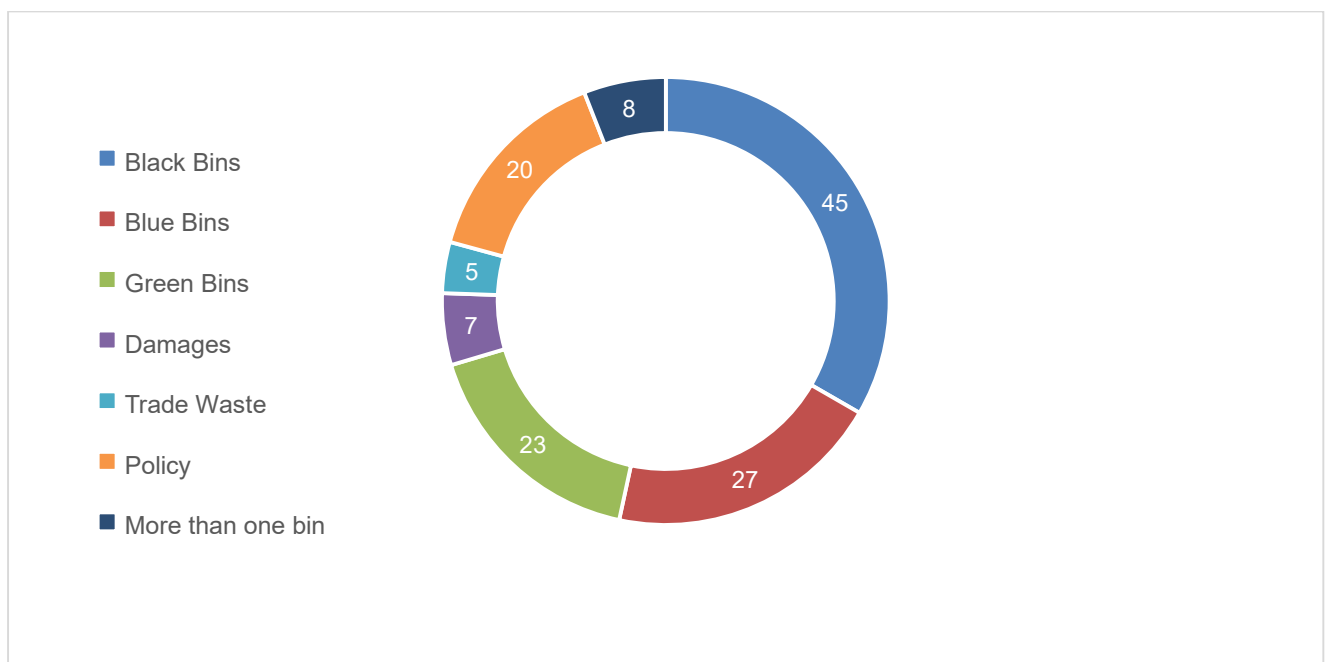
Complaints by sub-service are identified in the pie chart, this is how a service is broken down into the individual service request areas within. The bar graph displays resolution themes, or where these themes are too diffused and a trend cannot be identified, the bars will display root causes.

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).

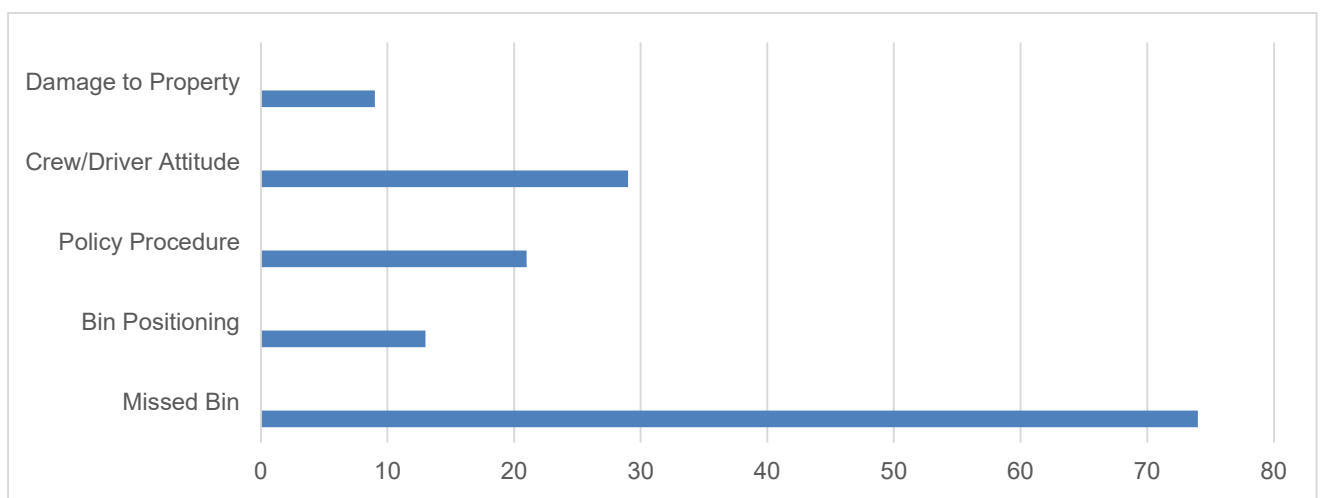
Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service

Waste	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2022-23	135	9	62%	4	22
2021-22	207	10	76%	5	16
2020-21	223	12	83%	1	4

Greater Cambridge Shared Waste: Cases by sub-service



Greater Cambridge Shared Waste: Resolution Theme



Waste - Service Comments

Bode Esan, Head of Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service:

The Shared Waste Service undertakes in the region of 744,000 collections per month, collecting 3 bins per household per fortnight, of which approximately 427,000 (57% of total) bin collections per month are within the City. The service has maintained the number of successful collections to over 99.71%

In 2022-23 the service recorded 11,399 bins in the city that were not collected on schedule for various reasons – at least 6,233 of these were outside the control of the service such as blocked roads, vehicle breakdowns or bad weather.

The total number of City complaints for the Shared Waste Service reduced from 207 in 2021-22 to 135 in 2022-23. This was mainly due to City and South Cambs working together to align the definition of what is a complaint and what is a service request. Service requests received through the complaints system are now allocated to the business support officers to action.

The Shared Waste service has commenced quarterly reporting of complaints data which has identified additional training needs and where needed, procedure changes have been put in place to help avoid the risk of repeated issues.

The teams have worked hard to reduce the number of complaints and reduce the response time over the last year, but the number of complaints responded to in target has dropped due to the absence of a key member of staff which caused allocation issues and high workloads across the teams caused by a number of issues including, staff retention and recruitment, an Extra bank holiday, earlier starts due to hot weather in August, staff sickness and an increase of vehicle accidents over the Christmas period, disruptions to service caused by period of bad weather in December and a high number of frozen green bins in January and February.

The most common reported complaints were repeated missed black bins including assisted - 55% of which were unjustified complaints such as unauthorised second black bins, contamination issues such as builders' rubble and disputed crew reports such as 'bin not out'.

The number of repeated missed blue bins was also high with a lot of residents reporting missed communal bins and bin position issues, for example, not returning to collection points or leaving in roads or driveways - 45% of complaints made about blue bins were unjustified, meaning that whilst the bin had not been emptied, the operatives had acted in line with policy by not emptying it.

There were several complaints about frozen green bins where the freezing temperatures meant that the contents would not empty with the mechanical lifting gear. The cold weather meant the bins were still frozen when the crew returned two days later to empty the missed bins.

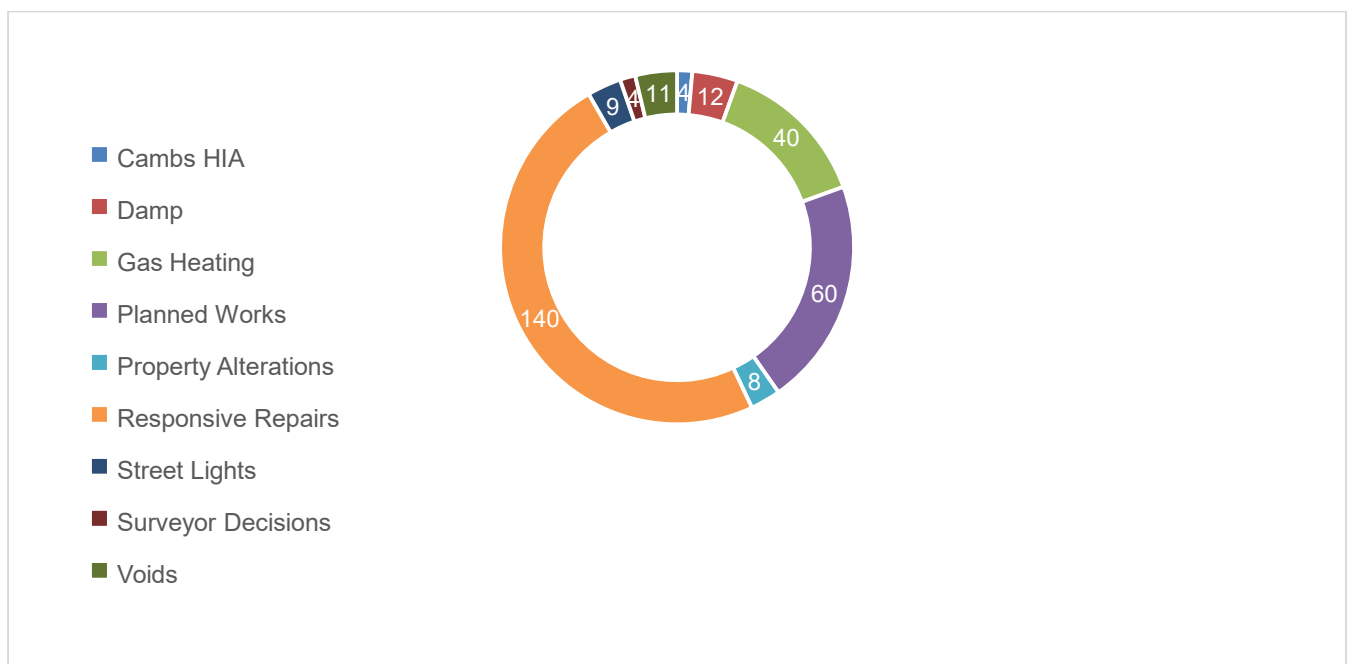
Policy complaints included side waste issues and collection start time – 85% of these were unjustified due to residents either leaving side waste in incorrect locations, or that the collection time being complained about was within the times outlined in our policies. Damages included reports of damaged vehicles or property – 29% of these were unjustified.

The Shared Waste service 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.

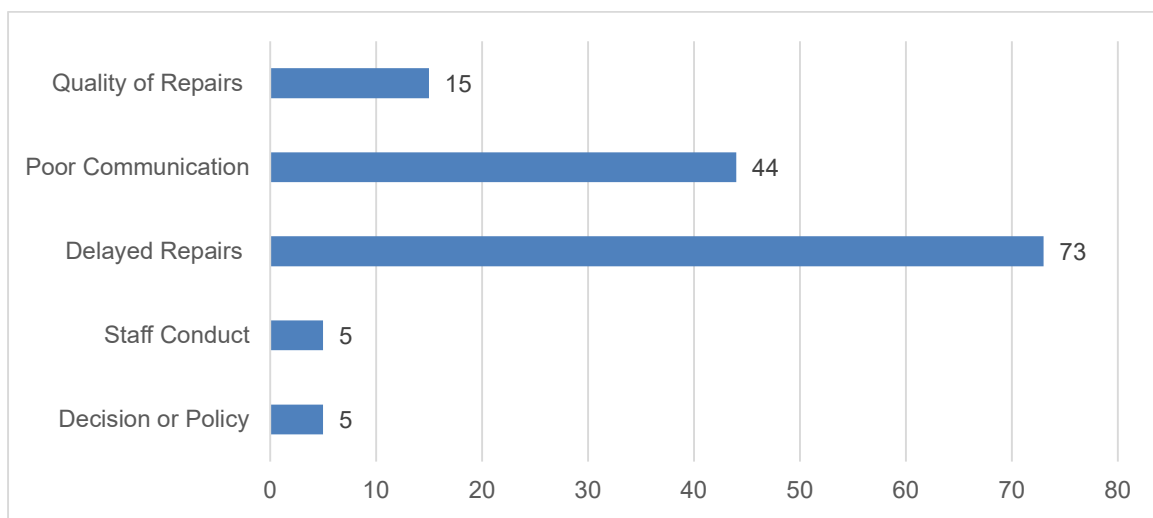
Housing Maintenance & Assets

Waste	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2022-23	288	25	78%	14	17
2020-21	202	10	81%	13	18
2019-20	169	12	86%	11	12

Housing Maintenance: Cases by sub-service



Housing Maintenance: Resolution Theme



Housing Assets & Maintenance - Service Comments

From Lynn Thomas, Head of Service:

The Housing Assets and Maintenance Team are responsible for the repair and maintenance of over 7,300 homes, 1,200 leases, 20 administrative buildings, 14 car parks and 144 commercial properties. During the year 22/23 we completed over 12,049 responsive repairs, 7,388 planned maintenance jobs, 6,000 planned maintenance service inspections and repair work to relet 670 properties. Therefore, we received complaints for 1.1% of the jobs we completed.

As part of our learning from complaints in 2021/22, we completed refresher training with all case owners in Housing Maintenance and Assets on the process of investigating complaints and requesting a target date extension when investigation and resolutions required them.

There has been an increase nationally with complaints in the social housing sector, the Social Housing White Paper has seen increased resident awareness of their right to complain and there have been campaigns by central government and the housing ombudsman to encourage tenants to complain as well as in the local and national media interest. Our increase in complaints falls in line with these trends. In January 2023, the housing Ombudsman reported it had seen a 139% increase in complaints, whilst we have experienced a 42.5% increase.

Trends in resolution theme remain consistent with previous years: Quality of repairs, poor communication and delayed repairs.

Last year 4.95% of our total complaints went to stage 2, whereas this year we have seen a rise to 8.6%. Our referrals to the Ombudsman have remained static, whereas nationally they have increased.

The number of complaints received for the sub-service areas remained stable in responsive repairs, Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (CHIA) and tenant alterations. There has been a slight increase in those relating to empty properties (voids) and damp, however, we have seen a substantial increase in complaints relating to gas heating and planned works.

The Ombudsman has seen a significant increase in heating and hot water cases reported to them, which has been mirrored in the number of complaints received by the Council. Our review has established that residents have experienced higher levels of breakdowns due in part to the number of refusals for boiler replacements due to COVID. Additionally, an unavoidable change of gas heating contractor contributed to the increase in complaints as they experienced resource problems which impacted on their performance. Acting quickly, we have taken steps to manage this with them and improvements in responsiveness are now being seen.

We have delivered more work this year through planned maintenance, however the main theme of complaints has been a failure of communication, this is something that we are addressing with our contractor as part of the new contract and asking them to particularly address with their subcontractors.

We have completed significantly more voids during this financial year; however, we have taken an updated voids standard and a voids policy through approval at scrutiny committee in January. I

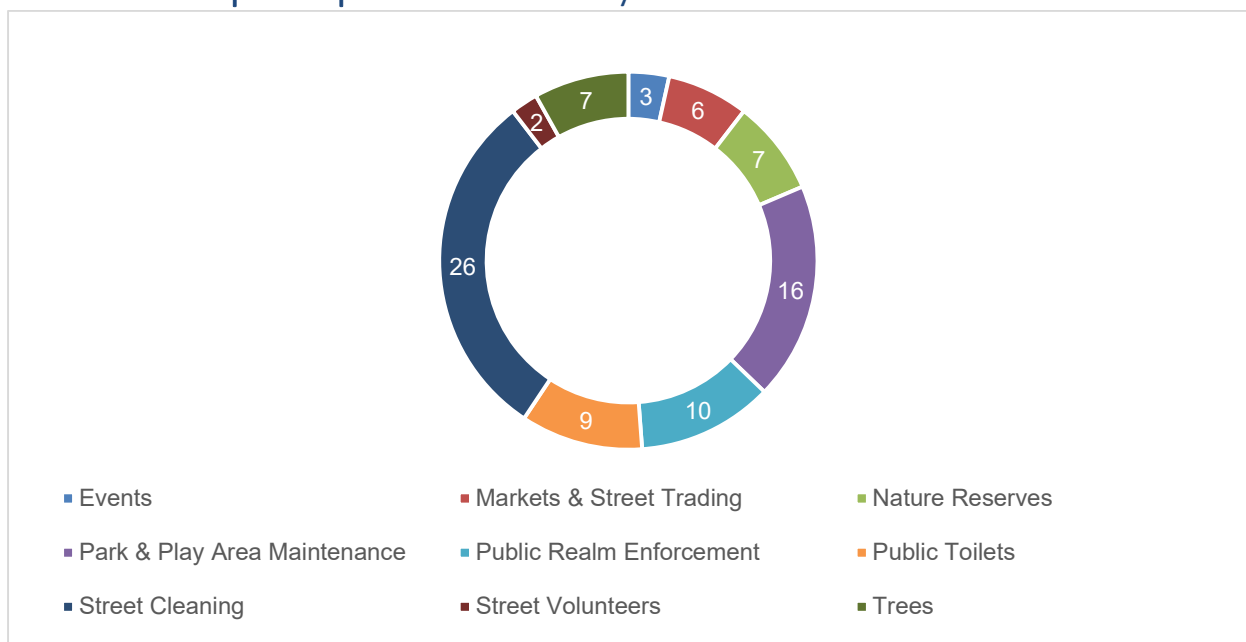
expect clarity around the standard and the process to address the root cause of these complaints in the future.

The slight increase in formal complaints relating to damp has been quite small when reflecting on the anticipated impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the increased energy costs and media interest in cases. We believe this is due to the changes we made at the beginning of December to our processes when dealing with reports of damp and mould and the additional literature and guidance we have issued.

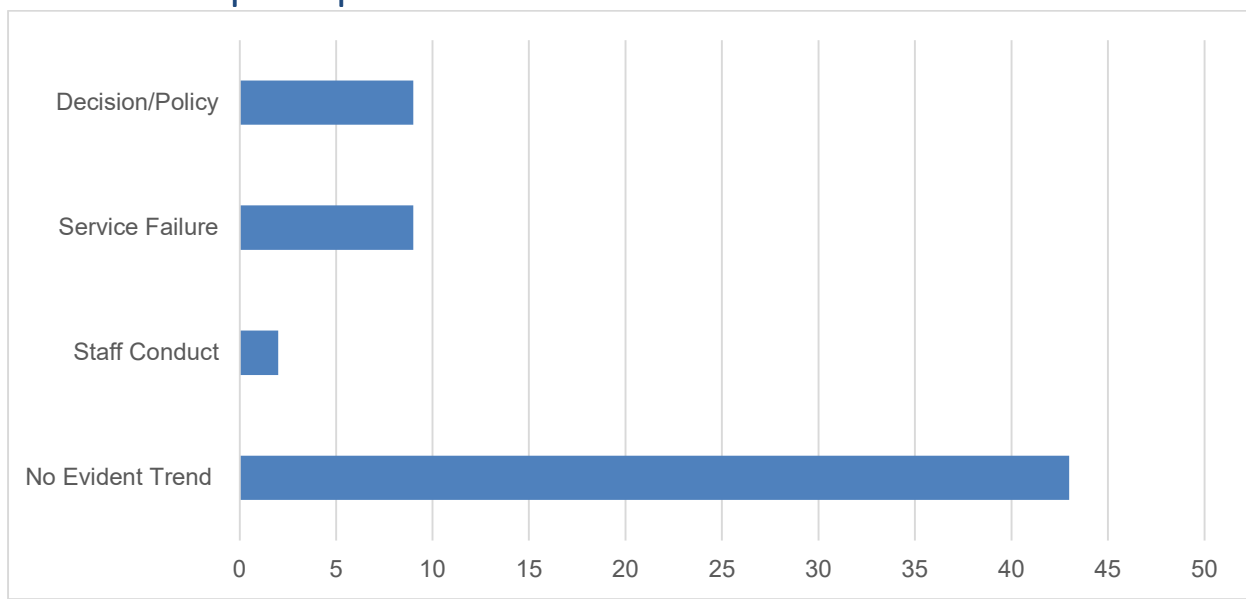
Environmental Services – Streets & Open Spaces

Streets & Open Spaces	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2022-23	86	6	85%	16	16
2021-22	91	6	85%	4	16
2020-21	120	3	85%	1	21

Streets & Open Spaces: Cases by sub-service



Streets & Open Spaces: Resolution Themes



Streets & Open Spaces - Service Comments

From Joel Carré, Head of Environmental Services:

Our **Streets and Open Spaces (S&OS)** service employs c130 staff and is responsible for managing the city's streets and parks and open spaces (c300 hectares), including public tree stock (c33,000), play areas (c107); public toilets (13), allotment sites (26) and 7 day per week market and street trading pitches; and providing daily cleansing, grounds maintenance and street enforcement services.

Over the past year, we have continued to see a significant increase in community use and enjoyment of our fantastic parks and green spaces for informal leisure and recreation; and city centre visitor footfall return to near pre-pandemic levels. 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. Both of these issues are not exclusive to Cambridge and continue to impact towns and cities across the United Kingdom.

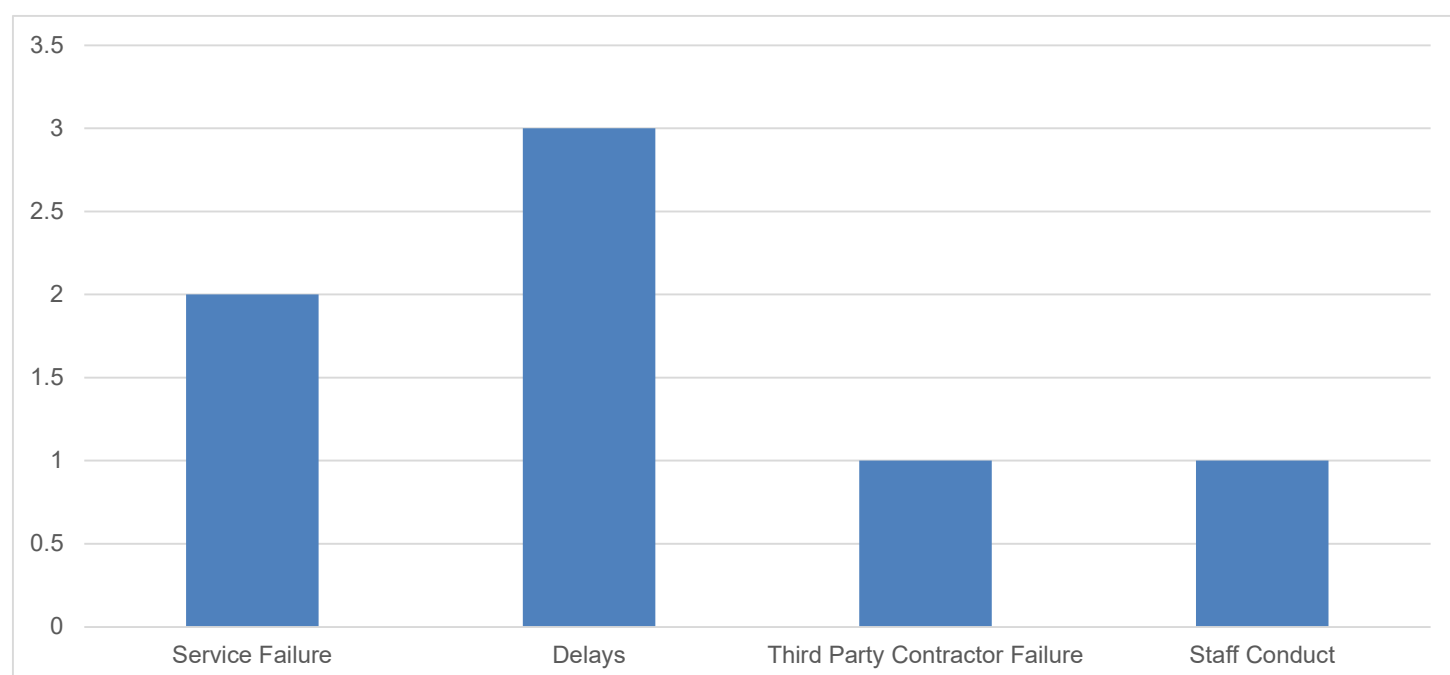
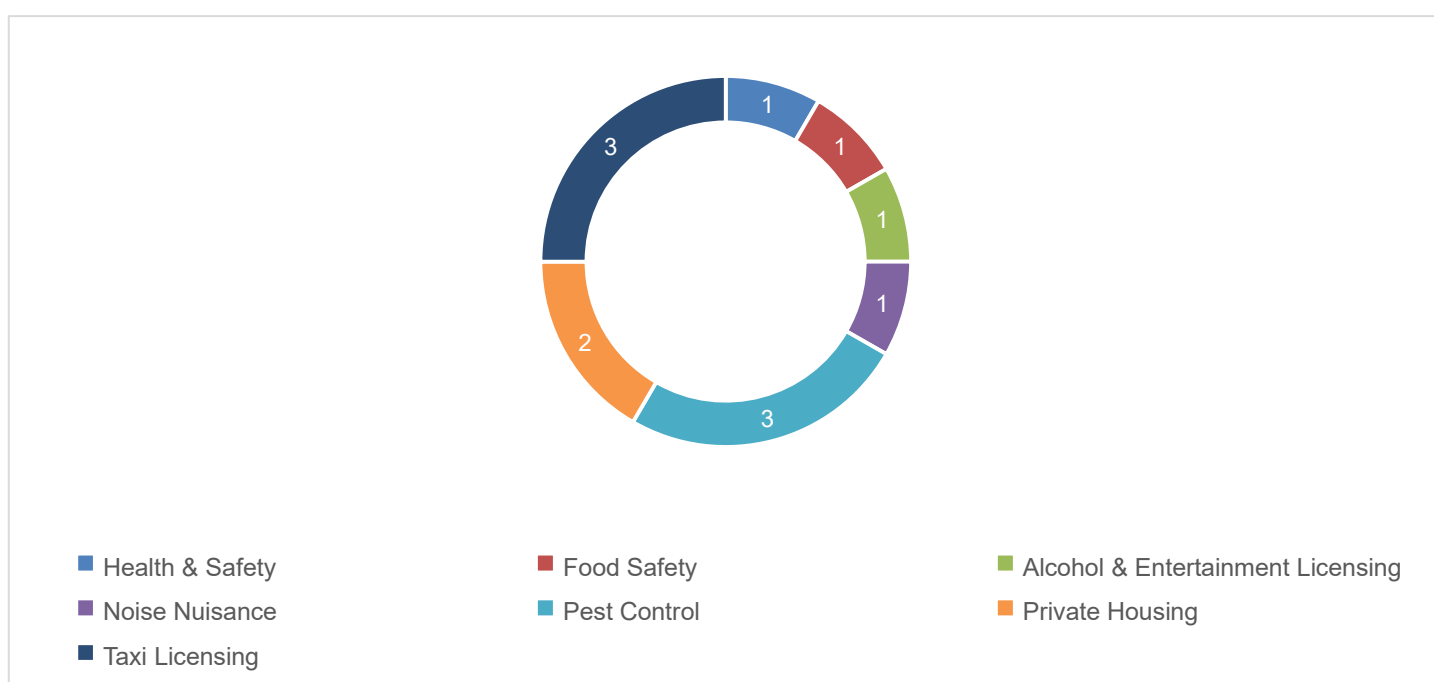
Despite the scale of operation and associated customer contact, as outlined above, the S&OS service received a total of 86 complaints in 2022/23, which is a reduction from the previous year's figure of 91. Of the 86 cases received, the service areas with the three highest number of cases were: Street Cleansing: 26 (2021/22 – 36); Park and Play Area Maintenance (including Grounds Maintenance): 16 (2021/22 – 9); and Public Realm Enforcement: 10 (2021/22 – 13). The remaining areas of service each accounted for 9 or less cases. An analysis of each of the associated cases by service area shows there was no particular complaint type or underlying causal theme. 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%, i.e.. the same as the previous year.

The service area with the single highest case numbers (26) was the Street Cleansing service. This large frontline operational service 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 grass. Given the significant scale of the operation and the afore-mentioned service demands, 26 complaint cases is 10 less than the previous year (2021/22 - 36) and equates to less than one case per week; and is not considered excessive.

Environmental Services – Environmental Health

Environmental Health	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2022-23	12	-	92%	4	5
2021-22	11	1	73%	2	2
2020-21	17	5	94%	8	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.

Over the course of 2022/23, the EH has delivered the following services:

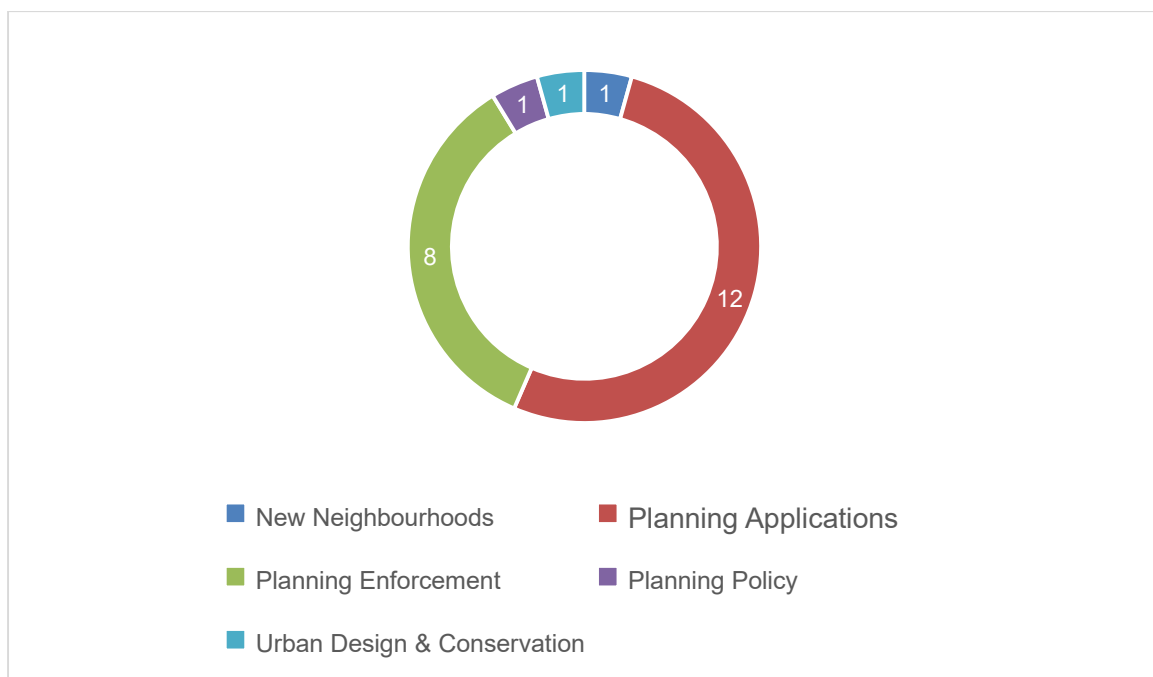
- 249 Private Sector Housing Inspections
- 742 Food Safety Inspections
- 28 Licensing Inspections
- 831 Pest Control cases
- 1050 Planning consultations
- 1750 Licensing Applications processed
- 2402 Service Requests, including housing, food safety, health and safety, licensing, taxis, noise nuisance

Despite the scale of operation and associated customer contact, as outlined above, the EH service received a total of just 12 complaints in 2022/23, which is broadly comparable with the previous year's figure of 11. Of the 12 cases received, the service areas with the three highest numbers of cases were respectively: Pest Control (3); Taxi Licensing (3) and Private Housing (2). These figures are not considered significant and an analysis of each of the associated cases shows there was no particular complaint type or underlying causal theme.

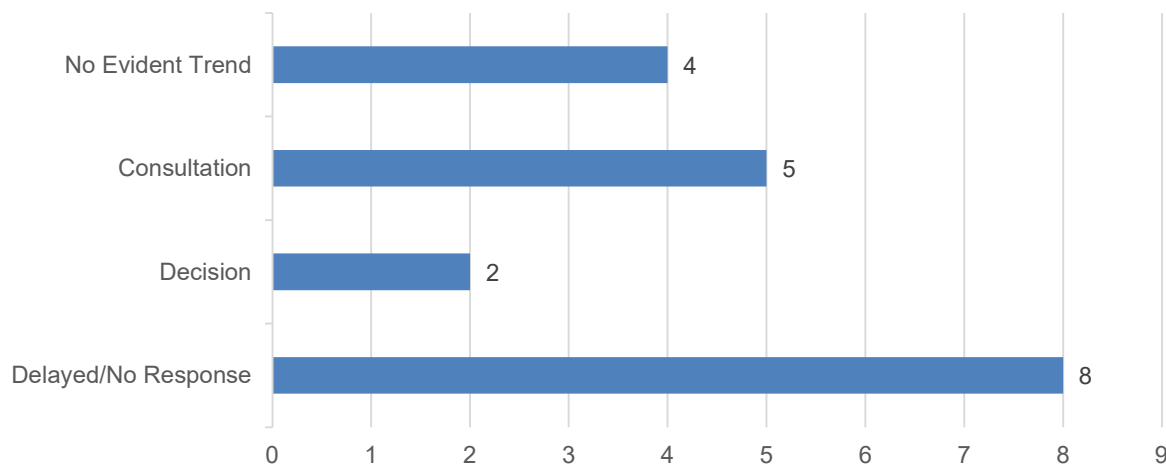
Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service

Planning Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2022-23	23	2	76%	-	-
2021-22	79	14	56%	2	2
2020-21	51	6	22%	-	-

Planning: Cases by sub-service



Planning: Resolution Themes



Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service - Service Comments

Heather Jones, Deputy Director of Planning & Building Control

The team have made an intensive effort to reduce the number of complaints received by the service, and this has been very effective with overall numbers reducing from 79 to 23 Stage one and 14 to 2 Stage two complaints in years 2021/22 to 2022/23 respectively.

In addition, the team have also increased the numbers responded to within target with an overall improvement of 20% from 2021/22 to 76% 2022/23. This has been the result of a targeted campaign by the team on how we deal with complaints and their prioritisation, which has had such a positive impact. The number of applications received and dealt with by the service remains similar to previous years thereby demonstrating a real improvement in this area.

In 2022/2023, the team have focussed on reducing response times, specifically in validation and decisions. Over 80% of applications are validated within 5 working days and the average decision time for householders has reduced to around 9.8 weeks during last year. The service will continue to improve on this trajectory during 2023/2024.

GCSP is undergoing a transformation journey with various areas identified for improvement, this has also had a positive impact on the number of complaints received by the service.

- There is no longer a backlog in validation
- The historical cases backlog for applications over 26 weeks has reduced from 1100 to less than 300
- Recruitment within the service is stable
- The structural change to the organisation of the Development Management teams

The Planning Compliance team have been subject to a transformation review, achieved a revamp of the webpage with a video and useful information, an online reporting form that submits data directly into the back office system with an automated response and are trialling tablets to update inspections whilst out on site. The planning Enforcement Register is now available online. This has contributed to more streamlined and effective service.

The focus of complaints has remained consistent with previous years, with the majority related to planning applications and planning enforcement. A review of the compliance team has also been undertaken with the employment of a dedicated manager in the team.

In respect of resolution themes, the majority relate to a delayed or no response. The team are working on improving this for the next financial year and will continue this positive trend.

Customer Services

Customer Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2022-23	22	-	100%	9	2
2021-22	25	-	100%	2	11
2020-21	19	-	89%	6	10

Customer Services - Service comments

Clarissa Norman, Customer Services Operations Manager

In 2022-2023 Customer services handled in excess of 205,755 contacts via telephone, email and face to face and received 22 complaints, which is a slight decrease from 2021-2022. Complaints continue to be very low in relation to the amount of contacts received, 0.01%.

Key challenges during the year included Homes for Ukraine, the cost-of-living crises, responding to enhanced obligations around damp and mould and periods of severe weather.

Customer services continued to work with teams across the Council to ensure the residents of Cambridge received all the information and support they needed to reduce the impact of any adverse financial, humanitarian and basic living situations which were affecting them.

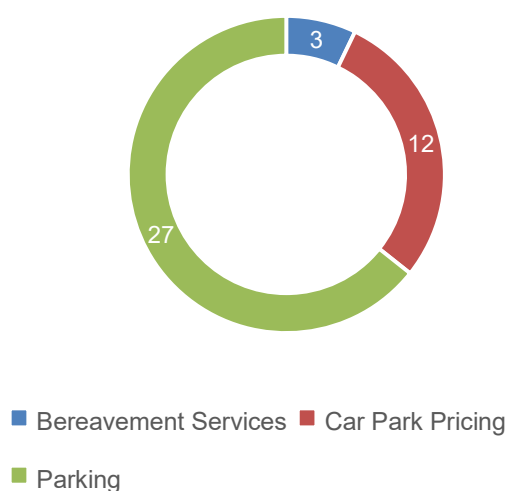
During the past year Customer Services has championed the use of proactive social media messages to enable residents to repair their own frozen boiler condenser pipes for example. This reduced the amount of time they were without heating and meant they didn't need to contact the Council for assistance. The principal of horizon scanning for known events, from severe weather to recovery notices is now a business-as-usual activity within the team, and has been used to give advance notice and information to residents around a range of council activities and external situations.

100% of complaints received in Customer Services were responded to within target, and for the third year running the service had no stage 2 complaints. There has been a significant reduction in the percentage of complaints attributable to advice given/staff conduct, 32% in 22/23, down from 52% in 21/22. This reduction is partially as a result of the improved change control and communications practises which are now in place. 14% (3) complaints were attributed to queues/long wait times. The service has had higher levels of sickness absence than in previous years, this combined with a return to pre-pandemic staff turn over levels has meant the service has been under resourced for periods during the year. We are working with our recruitment team to maximise our ability to recruit efficiently and effectively and are addressing absence in line with our absence policy. Furthermore, our now permanent business development officer is completing additional analysis on customer contacts to enable a review of resourcing and other improvement activities to be carried out.

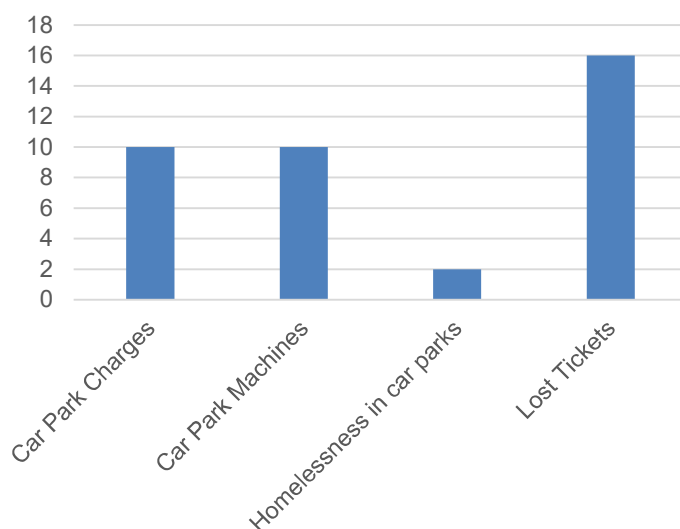
Commercial Services

Commercial Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2022-23	42	5	95%	-	3
2021-22	84	9	94%	-	6
2020-21	25	5	93%	-	1

Cases by Sub-Service



Resolution Theme



Commercial Services – Service Comments

James Elms, Head of Commercial Services

Overall, the service experienced a lower number of complaints this year (42), a 50% reduction vs last year and very low in relation to the number of visitors (circa 1.8 million) which equates to 0.0023% of those visits generating a complaint.

The service has focused on providing a positive customer experience and a continued consistent approach to complaints. The benefit of this consistent approach has been particularly evident in a reduction of 64% in lost ticket complaints.

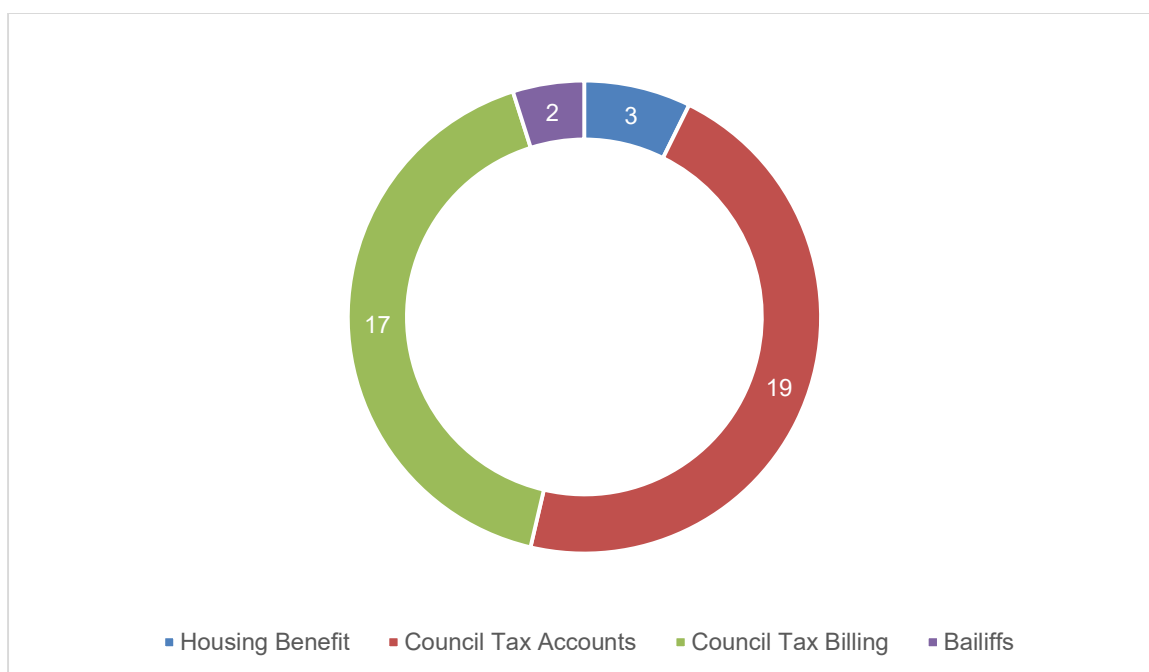
The complaints relating to car parking equipment have also significantly reduced due to the reassessment of cleaning and maintenance regimes and the implementation of robust processes and procedures, resulting in a reduction machine downtime.

The bereavement service received 3 complaints which is out of sync to previous years. There is no evident single root cause however, the service has reviewed a number of the systems and processes to ensure customer interactions are fully recorded and there is no single person failure. One complaint was referred to the ombudsman who found in favour of the Council.

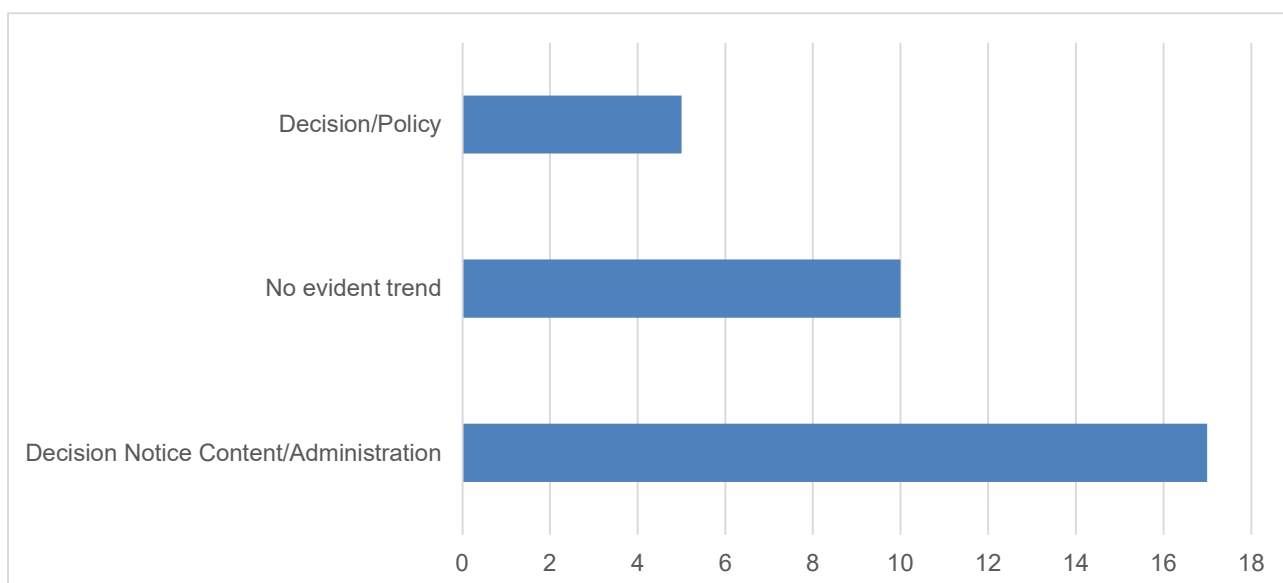
Revenues & Benefits

Revenues & Benefits	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2022-23	41	2	100%	1	4
2021-22	37	2	100%	2	17
2020-21	12	1	100%	-	26

Revenues & Benefits: Cases by Sub-Service



Revenues & Benefits: Resolution Themes



Revenues & Benefits – Service Comments

Caroline Ryba, Head of Finance

During 2022/23, the Revenues and Benefits teams sent over 220,000 documents, including:

- For Council Tax and Business Rates: approximately 180,000 documents including council tax bills, reminders, final notices and summons and correspondence relating to the administration of various discounts and exemptions.
- For Benefits: 40,000 decision notices including 4,000 Housing Benefit overpayment letters seeking recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit.

As a significant proportion of the documents issued relate to the recovery and enforcement of unpaid Council Tax, Business Rates or Housing Benefit, it is inevitable that these activities give rise to concerns that customers raise via the complaints channel. The numbers of complaints relating specifically to enforcement activity are very low and are handled sensitively to secure an amicable outcome whilst understanding the requirement to collect charges that are due.

We paused some Council Tax enforcement processes during 2020/21 and 2021/22, however recovery action was virtually back to normal last year. This has not translated into an increase in complaints, with numbers in 2022/23 very similar to before Covid.

However, given the sheer volume of transactions and changes made to accounts and the increase level of enforcement action the number of complaints remains consistently low which is testament to the quality and accuracy of the work being carried out by the team. In most cases, issues raised are dealt with quickly before a customer needs to resort to raising a formal complaint.

With an overall low level of complaints any trends identified are often linked to enforcement procedures which are primarily 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 work with those customers to find amicable solutions, so few complaints proceed beyond stage 1.

Supporting citizens during the current financial crisis remains a priority for the section. Of the three complaints registered for benefits, one was due to multiple changes affecting their entitlement, one was a comment on processes in place to claim and the final one was closed as details of the complaint were not provided for investigation.

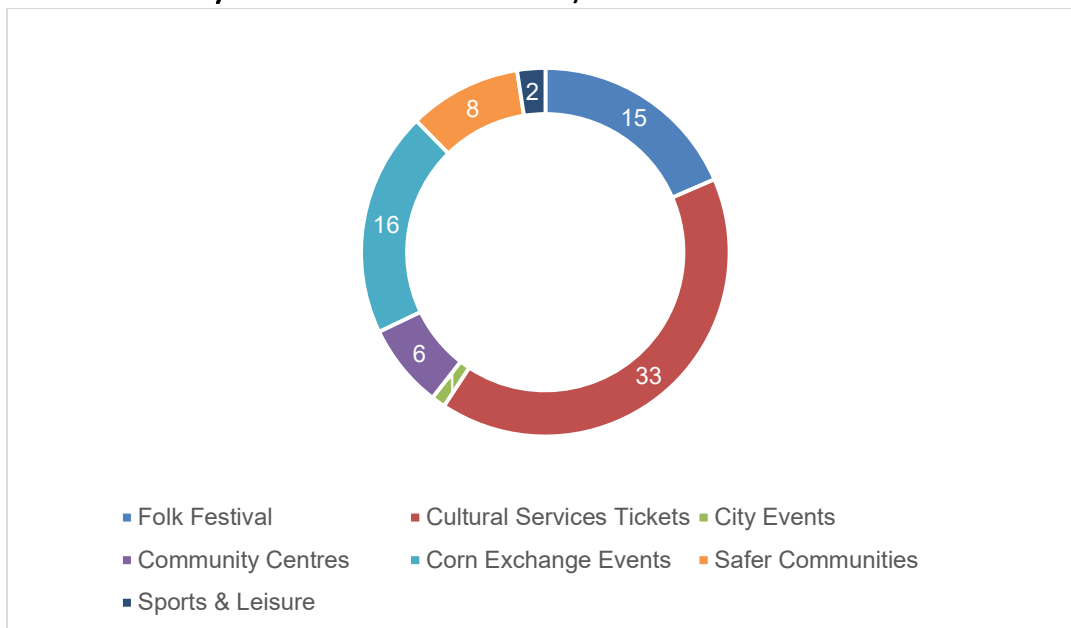
Previously there had been a number of complaints relating to processing delays. Team working on recovery have now embedded processes to suppress or prioritise cases where work is outstanding which has reduced processing delay complaints to six. Of the remainder, 16 complaints related to customers unhappy with decisions related to Council policy or Council Tax regulations.

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

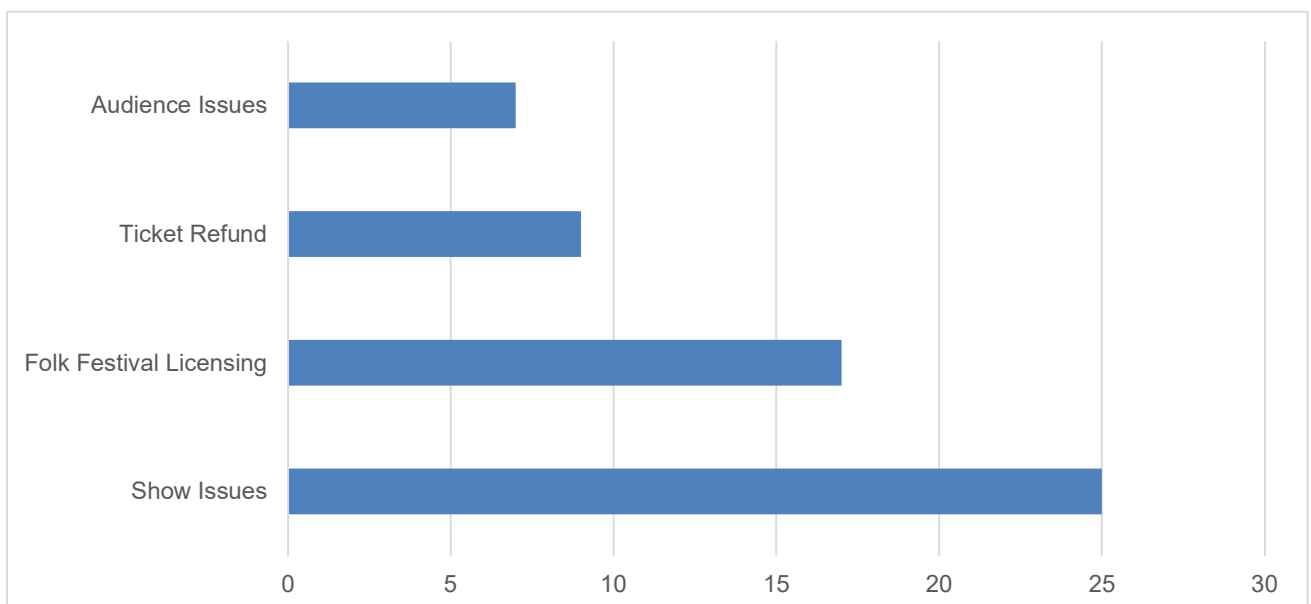
Community Services including Cultural Services

Community Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2022-23	81	5	56%	10	7
2021-22	62	2	93%	5	7
2020-21	16	3	81%	1	9

Community Services: Cases by Sub-Service



Community Services: Resolution Themes



Community Services - Service comments

Ian Ross, Keryn Jalli, Vicky Haywood and more, Community Services Managers

With regard to complaints arising in relation to community safety, all related to anti-social behaviour (ASB). The themes of the complaints included requests for service, and disagreement with the approach taken by the team.

This is common with anti-social behaviour cases as individuals are contacting the council to complain about the ASB they have experienced, not necessarily how it was handled by the team. It is also common for complainants to disagree with the approach taken by the Council. Complainants may wish for the Council to take the lead on issues, but the appropriate authority to take the lead are the Police as the complaints are about criminal behaviours. Where the Council is the lead agency, 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.

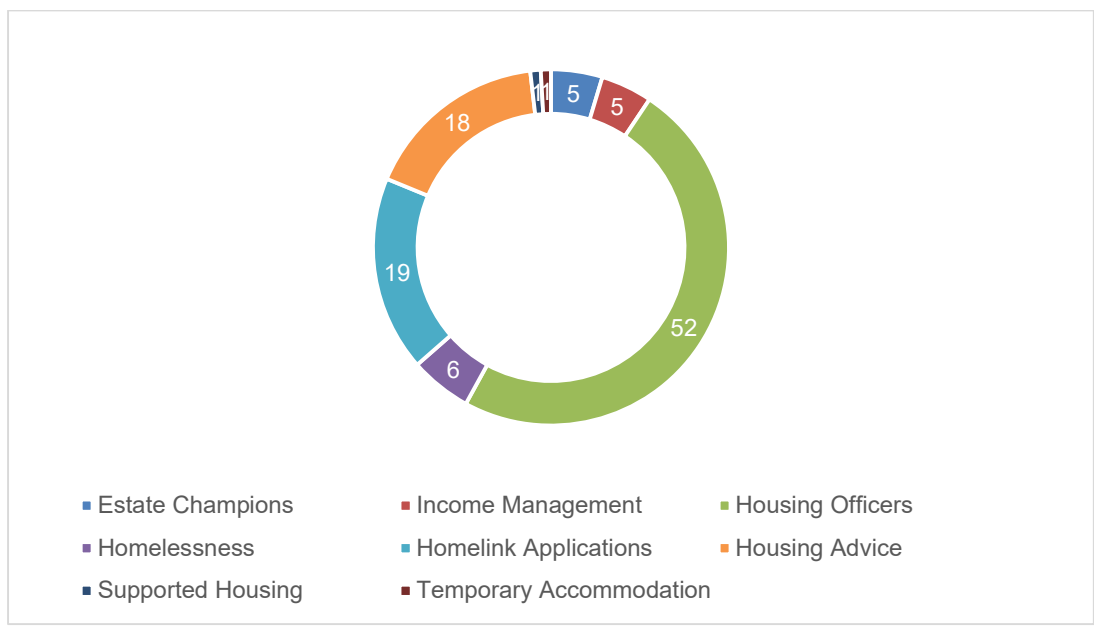
When working with residents on ASB complaints the Council communicates clearly about the most appropriate organisation to take action, what actions to take and the timescales of enforcement action to help manage expectation of the ASB enforcement process.

Most complaints within Cultural Services are related to shows at the Corn Exchange. There is a trend to ask for a ticket refund if the customer is unhappy with the show content. This is often the artist's decision on the night and advance programme information comes from the promoter who hired the hall, however we will look to include this point within our hire contracts. Some customers are finding the seating old and uncomfortable and have expressed this. We are in the process of procuring new seating for the venue which will improve the customer's experience.

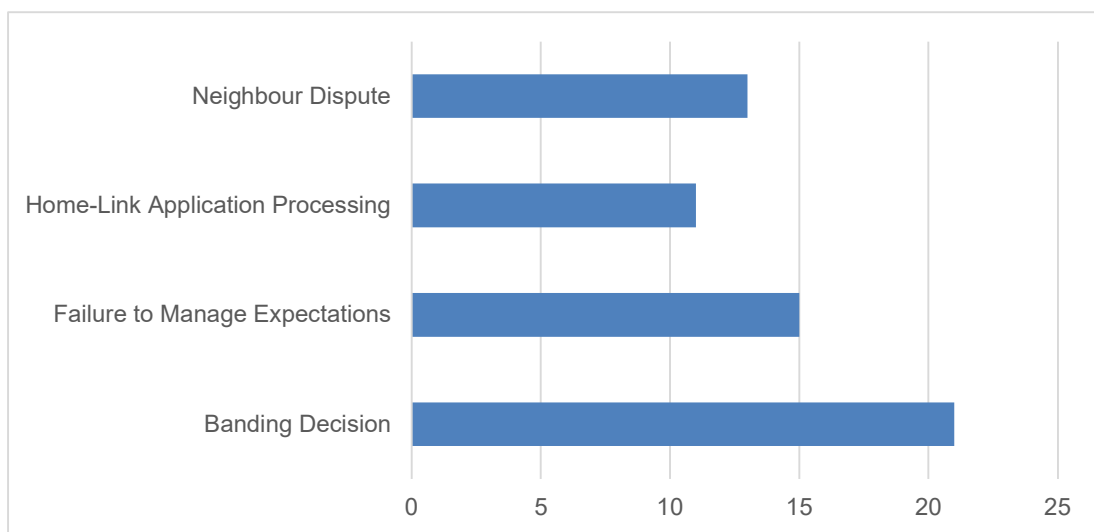
Housing Management Services

Housing Services	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target	Multi-Service Complaints	Compliments
2022-23	107	12	84%	18	13
2021-22	120	16	85%	12	28
2020-21	94	10	83%	18	29

Housing Management 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 8460 properties within the City and has placed 391 households into temporary accommodation during the year. We have also handled 1005 homeless applications, had 872 new applicants join the Home-Link register and opened 2261 housing advice cases in the year. We have provided tenancy and life skills support to 565 different customers during the year; of these our Supported Housing Services helped sustain 71 vulnerable people in their tenancies (social and private housing) and our Independent Living Service supported 494 older people in their homes.

City Homes

The top two complaint themes for City Homes during 2022/23 were as follows:

- Poor Communication
- Neighbour Dispute

By analysing cases relating to poor communication, a performance issue within the team has been identified which is being addressed by the Housing Services Manager. Actions for the team to improve communication with residents are outlined in the recommendations below.

The figures show that overall, complaints have reduced from last year and it could be suggested that Tenancy Audits may have had a small impact on this as issues are being identified proactively during the visits. For instance, 138 neighbour dispute issues were identified and dealt with as a direct result of tenancy audit work.

City Homes has made significant progress this year in ensuring that complaints are responded to within target timescales and no complaints have been escalated to stage 2 in the second half of the year.

Some of the key recommendations for improvement are to:

- explore ways to communicate procedures and reporting processes clearly with customers;
- communicate the importance of utilising the customer online portal with tenants by promoting the advantages of clear record keeping and ease of checking the progress of their requests.
- liaise with the Communications team to create effective content to get messages across to our tenants
- outline the importance of following up with tenants to our staff and to seek feedback from customers by encouraging them to access our feedback webpage.
- Re-introduce quarterly complaint performance meetings, which have lapsed due to staff changes

- Send staff on Restorative Justice training which develops key skills required for managing and resolving neighbour disputes.

Housing Advice

Key themes to note were:

- The number of complaints received for the year was almost identical to last year – 42 compared to 43 for 2021/22.
- 100% of complaints during the second half of the year were responded to within target. This was an improvement from 81% during the first half of the year.
- Complaints for the year were split between Home-Link at 41% and Housing Advice/homeless at 57%. A single complaint about the Temporary Housing Service accounts for the other 2%

In terms of themes, there was a drop of 17% from the previous year in complaints about the Home-Link service. This reflects the improvement in processing times which have peaked at around 6/7 weeks during this year. Complaints about the Home-Link service were made for variety of different reasons and it is difficult to identify themes. Alleged processing errors was perhaps the most common reason for complaints about the Home-Link service. More positively, complaints about processing times cannot be identified as a theme during 2022/23 as they were during 2021/22.

Again, it is difficult to identify themes in relation to complaints about housing advice and homelessness. However, the overall increase in complaints about this area of the service can, in part at least, be explained by an increase in complaints about homelessness application processing times, possibly resulting from increased caseloads due to increased homelessness pressure and staffing shortages. This will hopefully be addressed as we reach a full staff quota in Q2 2023-24.

Supported Housing and Performance

Supported Housing received 1 complaint during 2022/23; this related to staff behaviour in relation to the management of a fire safety concern caused by the condition of a tenant's home. This was resolved at Stage 1.

Supported Housing had 10 compliments during 2022/23; the majority of these thanked the Independent Living Facilitators, and also praised the Community Alarm Service they had received (which ceased on 31st March 2023).

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 not resolved within target. This is the same number of cases as last year.

3C ICT

Two complaints were received relating to Information Governance at stage one. One was responded to within target time, the other was not. This is an increase from one complaint last year.

Elections

Three complaints relating to Elections were received at stage one. All three were responded to within target time. This is an increase of three complaints compared to none last year.

Finance

Finance received no complaints this year, compared to three stage one complaints last year.

Human Resources

Human Resources received no complaints this year, compared to four stage one complaints last year.

Building Control

Building Control received no complaints this year, compared to four complaints at stage one last year.

Multi-Service Complaints

Multi-Service Complaints	Total Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints in Target
2021-22	42	10	83%
2020-21	29	5	84%
2019-20	23	3	83%

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 the number of cases resolved within target has remained consistent with the previous two years which shows Officers are still handling these cases efficiently.

There has been a slight increase in the number of multi-service complaints in 2022-23.

This year the area with the highest number of multi-service complaints was Housing Management Services with 18. As with previous years, other high-volume areas involved in multi-service complaints are Housing Maintenance & Assets (14), and Streets & Open Spaces (16). This is not unexpected 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.

The Streets & Open Spaces cases often involved Community Services as a secondary service as there was an antisocial behaviour element to the complaint.

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. This process will continue in the revised policy with a member of the Corporate Management Team being nominated to be the lead officer.

Non-Cambridge City Council

In addition to cases received relating to City Council services, nine cases were raised relating to issues for authorities or services not provided by the City Council. This is a slight reduction from ten in 2021-22, and 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 continued to keep the number of these cases submitted to a minimum.

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 2022-23 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman received 25 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, 5 were upheld and the remaining case was not upheld.

The LGSCO were satisfied that 100% of their recommendations from 2022-23 cases were implemented by the Council.

The information below relates to the number of complaints received and considered by the LGSCO.

Department	No of Complaints Received	Decision
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	6	1 Invalid 3 Closed after initial enquiries 2 Upheld
Housing	7	1 Closed after initial enquiries 1 Advice given 1 Invalid 2 Referred back for local resolution 2 Upheld
Planning & Development	3	<i>1 Not upheld</i> 1 Closed after initial enquiries 1 Referred back for local resolution
Benefits & Tax	4	2 Closed after initial enquiries 2 Referred back for local resolution
Highways & Transport	3	1 Upheld 2 Closed after initial enquiries
Cemeteries & Crematoria	1	1 Closed after initial enquiries
Corporate & Other Services	1	1 Closed after initial enquiries
Total	25	5 Upheld 2 Investigated but not upheld 2 Invalid 5 Referred back for local resolution 11 Closed after initial enquiries

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.

Housing

Complaint: 22 001 503 - 20/12/22

This complaint related to the way the Council handled the complainant's daughter's housing application. The complainant claimed that the Council had incorrectly awarded band C based on advice from a medical advisor that had not seen all evidence provided. The complainant said that the Council did not explain how 26 pages of evidence were lost, not why it did not consider the applicant needed an extra bedroom for an overnight carer.

Following their investigation, the Ombudsman found that there was fault in relation to the Council's initial delay in processing the housing application.

The Ombudsman found that the Council had already remedied the injustice by apologising, and no further recommendations were made.

Environment and Regulation

Complaint: 21 015 046 - 25/09/22

The complainant raised this complaint because they believed that the Council failed to take adequate action to investigate and address noise nuisance coming from a nearby business. The complainant claimed that the noise significantly affected the day to day lives of both them and their neighbours.

The Ombudsman found that the Council carried out an appropriately thorough investigation into the reports it received of excessive noise from the business site, including several visits to different nearby locations to observe the noise. The Council accepted some faults in the investigation and agreed with the Ombudsman that two officers should have been present during one of the site visits, as well as waiting for the outcome of an acoustics report before making a decision that the noise was not a statutory nuisance.

The Ombudsman found that the fault did not cause the complainant a significant personal injustice.

The LGSCO recommended the following actions

The Council suggested appropriate improvements to its practices relating to investigating noise nuisances to prevent the fault occurring again. The Ombudsman also recommended that within one month of the date of the final decision the Council should provide evidence that it carried out the service improvements set out in the complaint response, which were:

- A review of its noise assessment and decision-making process

- Measures to ensure consistency around officer attendance on visits and signing off on decision making
- Relevant training to be arranged for Environmental Health Officers to ensure processes are followed
- Review and update the Councils' website to make it clear what customers can expect from this part of the service

Housing Services

Complaint: 21 018 416 - 10/10/22

The complainant complained that the Council provided them with interim accommodation on the hospital scheme that was not suitable for their needs after being discharged from hospital. The complainant further complained that the Council removed them from the hospital scheme without telling them and delayed in deciding if they were in priority need for housing.

The Ombudsman found that there was no record of what information the Council considered when it decided the first property was suitable for the complainants needs. This left uncertainty about whether the property was suitable for the complainants needs between when they moved in and when the Council considered its suitability four weeks later.

There are no records that show how the out-of-hospital scheme was explained to the complainant before they entered it, or what benefits they could expect to receive. There is no evidence to suggest that the complainant was removed from the scheme without explanation.

The LGSCO recommended the following actions

- Within one month of the decision, the Council should apologise to the complainant and pay £100 to recognise the avoidable uncertainty they were caused about the initial suitability of the property due to poor record keeping and lack of communication about the out-of-hospital scheme.
- The Council to review how it shares information about the out-of-hospital scheme's benefits and expectations with people and how it accurately records those conversations

These recommendations were carried out in October 2022 and reported to Housing Scrutiny Committee in January 2023

Parking Services

Complaint: 22 001 705 - 10/05/22

The complainant complained that they were required to pay a lost ticket fee of £29.40 at a Council operated car park after the payment machine did not return their ticket. The complainant claims that the Council refused to issue a refund for this fee even though evidence was provided from the bank to show that payment had been made.

Upon receiving the complaint, the Ombudsman encouraged the Council to reconsider its decision not to issue a refund as they feel the Council had not given proper consideration to the evidence.

Following this, the Council did issue the complainant with a refund and the Ombudsman decided no further investigation was required.

Licensing

Complaint: 22 001 705 - 10/05/22

The complainant complained about the Council's processes and decisions made regarding the change of use of the land near their house. The complainant claimed that the Council failed to carry out an environmental impact assessment and did not demonstrate how the biodiversity of the site would be protected. The complainant felt that the matter caused undue stress and anxiety.

The Ombudsman found that the Council had caused the complainant an injustice, and recommended that:

- The Council change its record keeping procedures by 17th May 2023 to ensure it keeps records of biodiversity assessments and inspections even when it does not identify any substantive issues or risks
- The Council should provide the Ombudsman with evidence of the above action once completed.

The Ombudsman are satisfied that the above actions were carried out.

Number of LGSCO cases, yearly comparisons 2020 – 23

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
2022-23	25	6	5
2021-22	12	4	3
2020-21	9	4	3

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.

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, 2022/23

During 2022-23 the Council received four complaints about Councillors. All four of these complaints remain under consideration at the time of this report. A complaint still outstanding from the previous year was concluded with an apology from the subject member.

There were four complaints in 2021-22 and nine complaints in 2020-2021. 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