

REPORT TO:	SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
SUBJECT:	Annual Complaints Report - Complaint performance 2019/2020 & 2020/2021 summary report
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Carlton Young – Cabinet Member for Resources & Financial Governance
LEAD OFFICERS:	Kim Hyland, Interim Complaints Manager
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:	Elaine Jackson, Interim Assistant Chief Executive

CORPORATE PRIORITY

A high level overview of the performance of the Council's complaints detailing service level agreements (SLA), number of complaints upheld, themes and learnings. The way in which complaints are used to drive service improvements plays a key role in Croydon Council's drive to be an excellent authority which delivers both a positive resident experience and shows that we are a learning organisation. How the Council reports on these improvements both internally and publically is subject to consideration and will be a key part of operating in a more transparent way.

For **Corporate Complaints** Croydon operates a two stage corporate complaints policy. The first stage is investigated by the service who the complaint is regarding. The second stage is escalated to an independent investigation by the complaints resolution team. The policy varies between Local Authorities, some of which operate a 1 stage policy and others a 3 stage policy.

For **Children's Statutory Complaints** Croydon operates a three stage complaints policy. The first stage is investigated by the service or services who the complaint is regarding. The second stage is an Independent Investigation by an appointed Independent Investigator and Independent Officer. Finally, the third stage is a Review Panel Hearing. This is standard across all Local Authorities and follows Statutory guidelines.

For **Adults Statutory complaints** Croydon operates a one stage complaints policy, which is investigated by the service or services who the complaint is regarding. This is standard across all Local Authorities and follows Statutory guidelines.

Ombudsman complaint – When a resident is provided with a final response to their complaint they are provided with the details they are able to take in escalating their complaint further. The next step of the process is to them to request an investigation into their complaint by the Housing Ombudsman or Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

ORIGIN OF ITEM	The Corporate & Statutory Complaints report is received by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee on an annual basis. Due to the Covid pandemic and other priorities the annual presentation did not occur last year. This report therefore covers a 2 year period.
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PURPOSE:

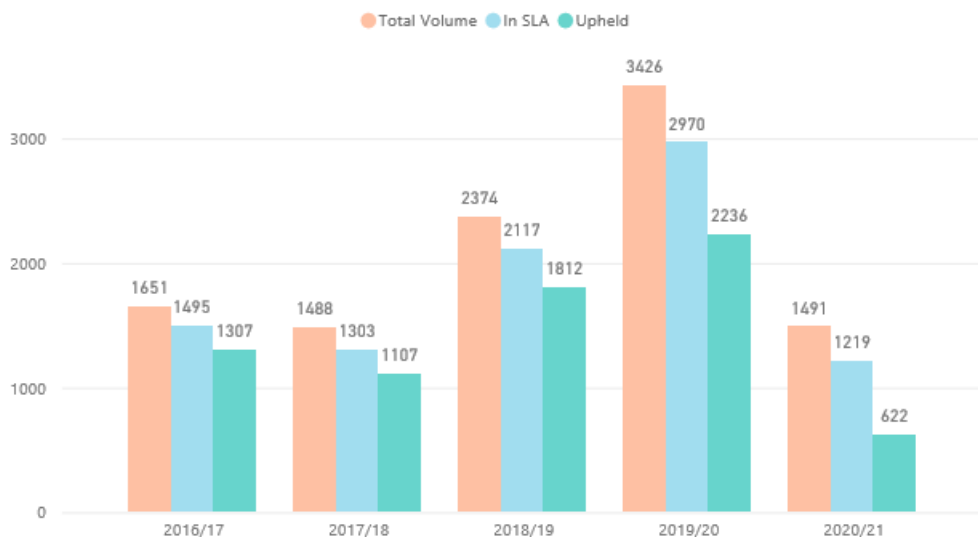
The Scrutiny & Overview Committee is asked to: -

1. Note the information provided in the Annual Complaints Report.
2. Consider whether it is satisfied with the performance of the Council in regard of complaints and that there is both corporate and political ownership of the process.
3. Consider whether it is satisfied that the Council is effectively using complaints received to inform service improvement.
4. Consider whether the data provided highlights any areas of concern that should be consider for further investigation by Scrutiny.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides a two year summary position of Corporate and Statutory complaints, 2019/20 (1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020) and 2020/2021 (1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021).

1.2 The chart below shows a 5 year view: 01 April 2016 – 31 March 2021 which provides an indication of trends in terms of numbers over the period. As the structure of Divisions and Services has changed significantly over the period, the below is shown as an indication of trends over the period.



2. IMPROVEMENTS MADE AND ACTIONS TAKEN:

2.1 Numerous improvements have been made across the organisation as a result of learning from complaints, and recommendations and orders made by the Ombudsman. Below are some of the changes made:

- An update made to the advice of parents to reflect the current law and to make it clearer the SEN rights of appeal.
 - A review of the policy and procedure to ensure amended Education Health and Care Plans are done in a timely manner, and within eight weeks of sending out the amendment notice.
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- Implementation of a plan to chase parties when they do not provide or delay in providing information for Annual Reviews of Education Health and Care Plans in a timely manner.
 - A review of the procedures to ensure that adequate information on costs is given to service users at the outset.
 - A review and amendment to procedures to bring them into line with the Care and Support Statutory Guidance which states that where a local authority is meeting needs by arranging a care home, it is responsible for contracting the provider and for paying the full amount.
 - A review of the exceptional circumstances criteria of its vehicle crossover policy.
 - A review of the way the highways department records decisions and ensure the reasons for a decision are fully explained to applicants.

- A review of the contracts and monitoring arrangements with providers of interim and temporary accommodation to ensure the properties are fit for purpose and of an appropriate standard.
 - Provided advice to contractors that they should retain records of monitoring and consider taking photographs as evidence that collections have been completed.
 - Reminder sent to staff of the importance of keeping accurate and contemporaneous records of contacts with those approaching as homeless or threatened with homelessness. This is to ensure that the Council are able to show what advice it has given, and how it has complied with the law and national guidance.
 - A review of the procedures to ensure reports of noise that are referred to the ASB team are actioned and the complainant contacted in a timely way.
 - A review of procedures to ensure adequate records of visits and assessments are maintained.
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- A reminder sent to all relevant officers of the need to ensure accuracy when drafting Improvement Notices.
 - Memo sent to all CFE officers to remind them of the need to confirm in writing if it considers care arrangements for a child are a private family arrangement/private fostering agreement and to outline any financial implications of that.
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- Implement a refreshed statement of purpose to ensure private fostering arrangements receive robust scrutiny and review.
 - A review of the procedures in how the Council identifies and deals with preparing young people with EHC Plans for transition to post-16 education to ensure they are dealt with in line with the relevant law and statutory guidance.
 - A review of current procedures to ensure there is no delay between receiving a housing application and assessing any medical evidence.
 - A review of the housing allocation policy to include a section about sheltered accommodation and the exercise of discretion. .
 - Implementation of a 'decant policy'
 - Amendment to complaints policy to ensure responding officers are independent from those complained about.
 - Update made to complaints page on Croydon website to make it simpler for residents to complain or make a service request
 - New complaints management system implemented
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- Monthly Complaints Officer bulletins sent to those responsible for complaint handling
- Increased service improvement meetings between dedicated Complaints Officers and high volume services.
- Implementation of a 'Housing Improvement Plan'. This is being led by the Interim Executive Director for Housing, Dr Alison Knight.

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

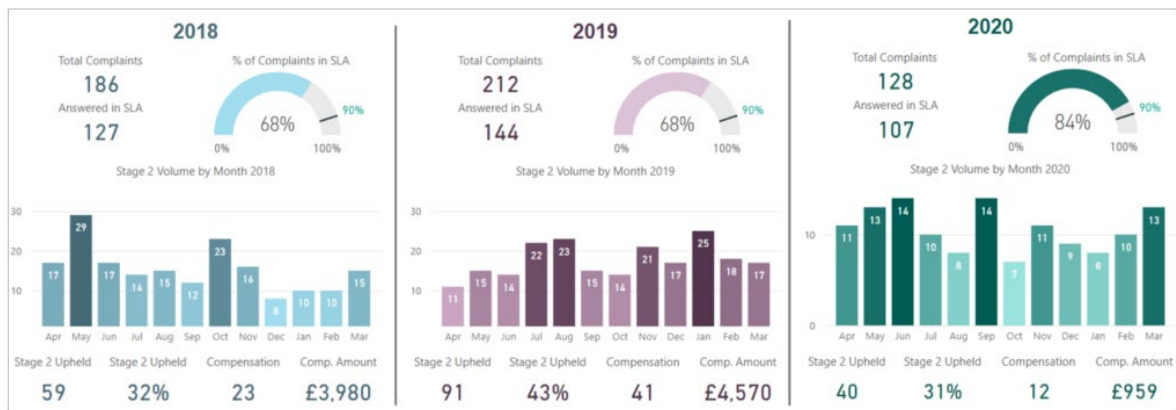
3. COMPLAINTS – HIGHLIGHTS/LOWLIGHTS

Stage One



- 3.1 The volume of corporate **Stage one** complaints increased by 44% or 1051 complaints in 2019/2020 compared to 2018/2019, but decreased by 61% in the year 2020/2021.
- 3.2 81% of corporate **Stage one** complaints have been responded to within the 20 working day corporate target in 2020/2021, a reduction of 6% and 8% on the two previous years respectively.
- 3.3 43% or 572 corporate **Stage one** complaints were upheld for 2020/2021. This has reduced from 65% of upheld complaints in 2019/2029 and 76% in 2018/2019.
- 3.4 £7,122 compensation was paid at Stage 1 this year, a reduction of £14,667 on 2019/2020 and a slight increase of £672 in comparison to the year 2018/2019.

Stage 2



- 3.5 The volume of corporate **Stage two** complaints increased by 14% or 26 complaints in 2019/2020 compared to 2018/2019, however this year 2020/2021 has seen a 39% or 83 complaint reduction.
- 3.6 84% of **Stage two** complaints were answered within the 20 working day target in 2020/2021, compared to 68%, in the two previous years.
- 3.7 31% of corporate **Stage two** complaints were upheld for 2020/2021. This is a decrease of 12% on 2019/2020, and a 1% decrease on the year before.
- 3.8 2020/2021 saw a decrease in compensation paid in comparison to the two previous years. A total of £959 in compensation was paid this year, compared to £4,570 and £3,980 2019/2020 and 2018/2019 respectively.

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

Ombudsman investigations are complaints that have been escalated by residents who have fully completed the complaints process and are not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint. The Ombudsman, should they decide to investigate, send all enquiry correspondence via the Complaints Team who manage all contact and provide all requested information.



3.9 The volume of LGSCO investigations in 2020/2021 decreased by 51% (42 investigations) in comparison to those received in 2019/2020, and by 38% (25 investigations) in comparison to the number received in 2018/2019.

3.10 85%, or 35 LGSCO investigations were responded to by their due date in 2020/2021, an increase of 1% and 8% on the two previous years.

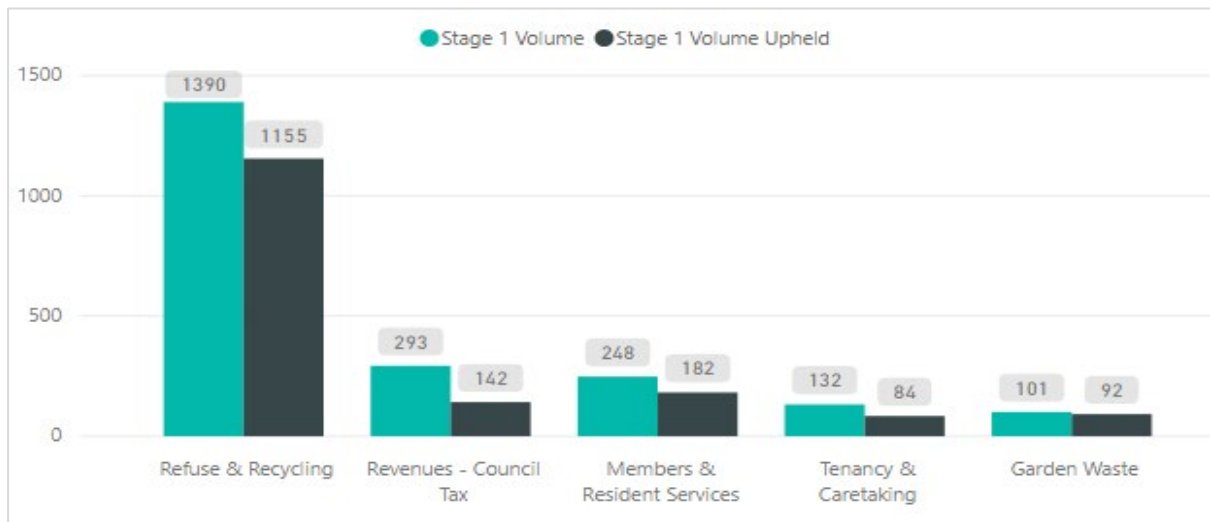
3.11 24%, or 10 LGSCO investigations were upheld for 2020/2021, compared to 22% in 2019/2020 and 14% in 2018/2019.

4. HIGHEST VOLUME AREAS OF COMPLAINT COUNCIL WIDE

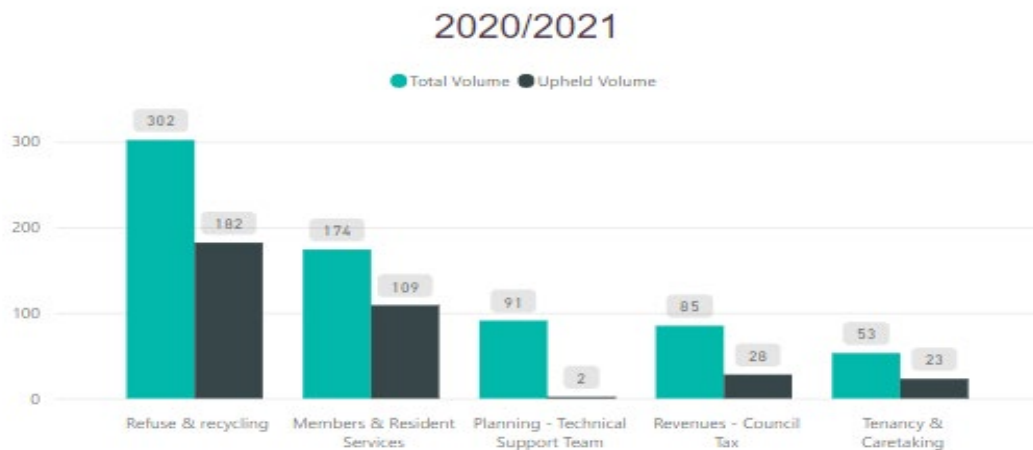
4.1 The corporate target is to respond to 90% of complaints within the target of 20 working days.

4.2 The services with the highest volume of **stage one** complaints for 2019/20 and 2020/21 are as follows:

a. Highest Volume Areas – Corporate Stage 1 – 2019/2020

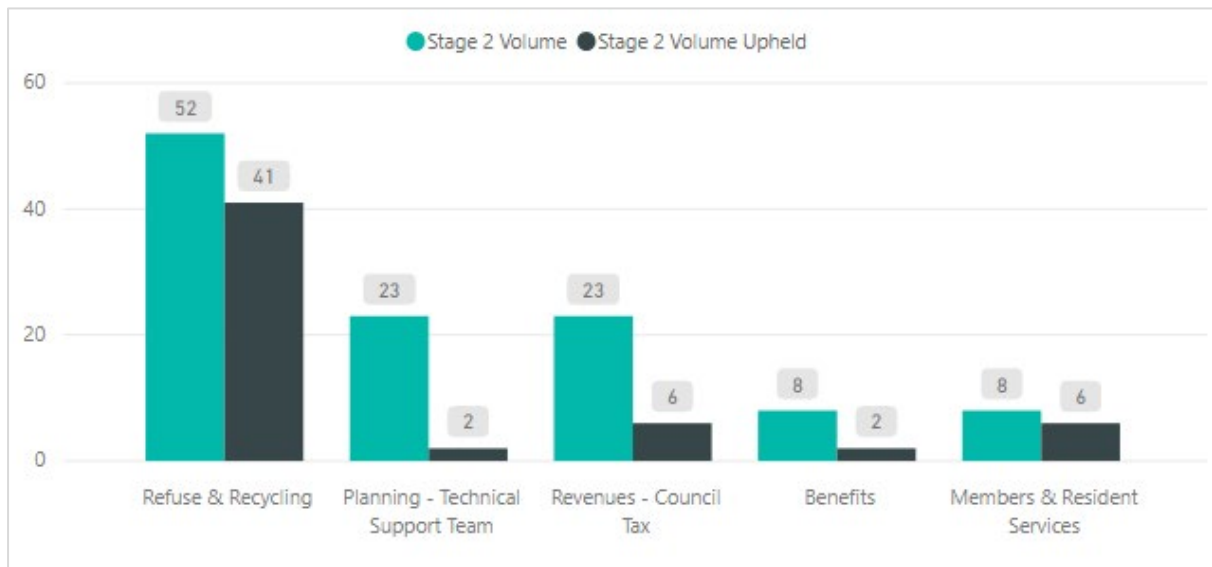


b. Highest Volume Areas – Corporate Stage 1 – 2020/2021

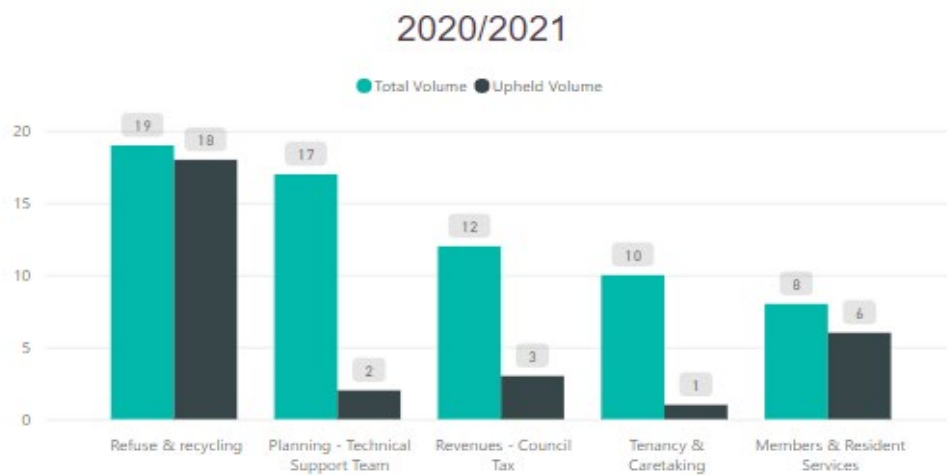


4.3 The services with the highest volume of **stage two** complaints for 2019/20 and 2020/21 are as follows:

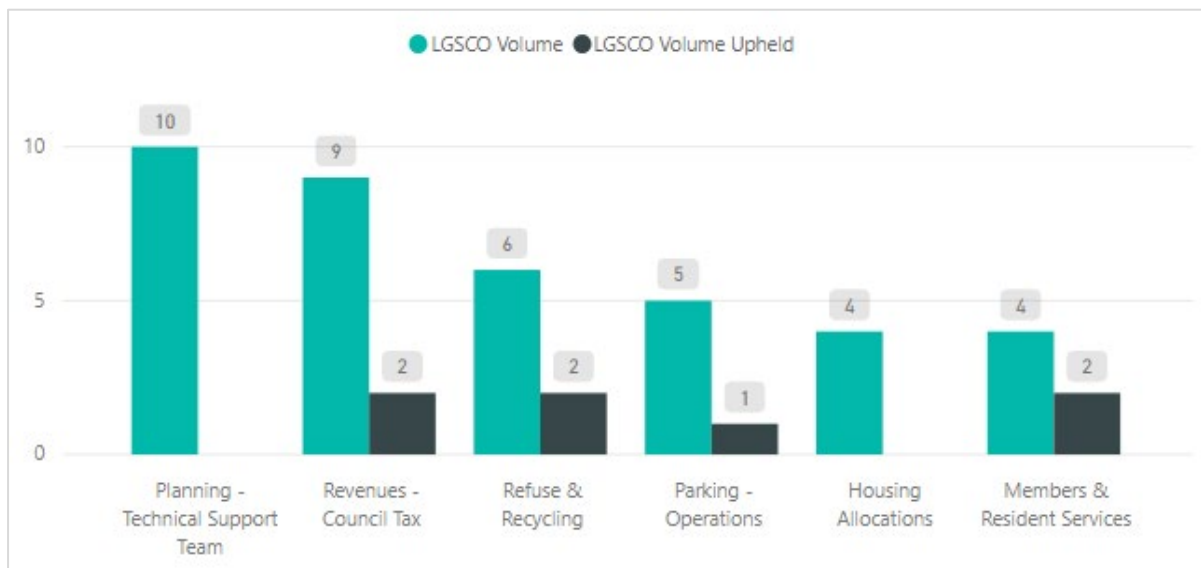
c. Highest Volume Areas – Corporate Stage 2 – 2019/20



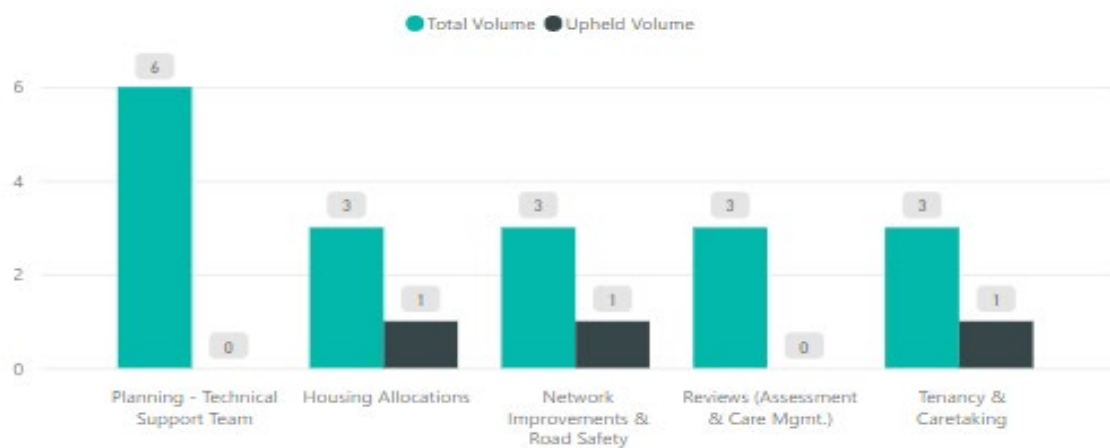
d. Highest Volume Areas – Corporate Stage 2 – 2020/21



e. Highest Volume Areas - LGSCO complaints – 2019/20



f. Highest Volume Areas – LGSCO complaints – 2020/21



Please note that the highest volume LGSCO complaints include both Corporate and Statutory.

4.4 There were 16 Upheld or Partially Upheld cases against Croydon in 2019/2020 in the following services:

- Council Tax - 2
- Adult Care Services - 3
- Education & Children Services - 2
- Environmental - 3
- Housing – 5
- Parking - 1

Further details of the findings and the recommendations can be found in Appendix A.

4.5 There were 14 Upheld or Partially Upheld cases against Croydon in 2020/21 in the following services:

- ASB - 1
- Adult Day Services - 1
- Tenancy and Caretaking - 1
- Environmental - 2
- Private Sector Housing – 1
- Insurance – 1
- Community Safety – 1
- Adult Assessments – 2
- Direct Payments – 1
- Adults Finance- 1
- SEN 0 – 25 years - 1
- Children’s Care Planning - 1

Further details of the findings and the recommendations can be found in Appendix B.

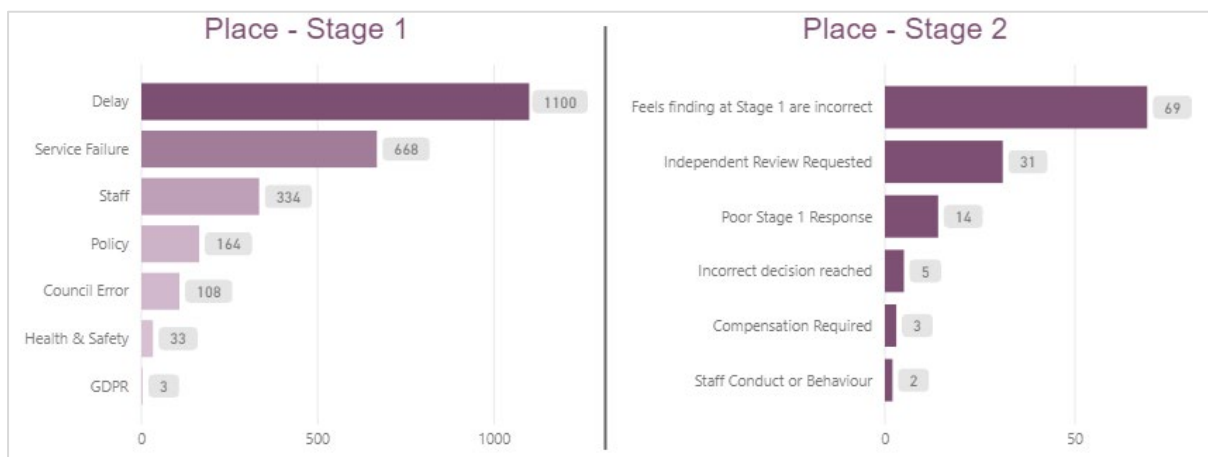
Please note: There are currently 12 open cases awaiting decision.

5. CORPORATE COMPLAINT THEMES – PLACE AND RESOURCES

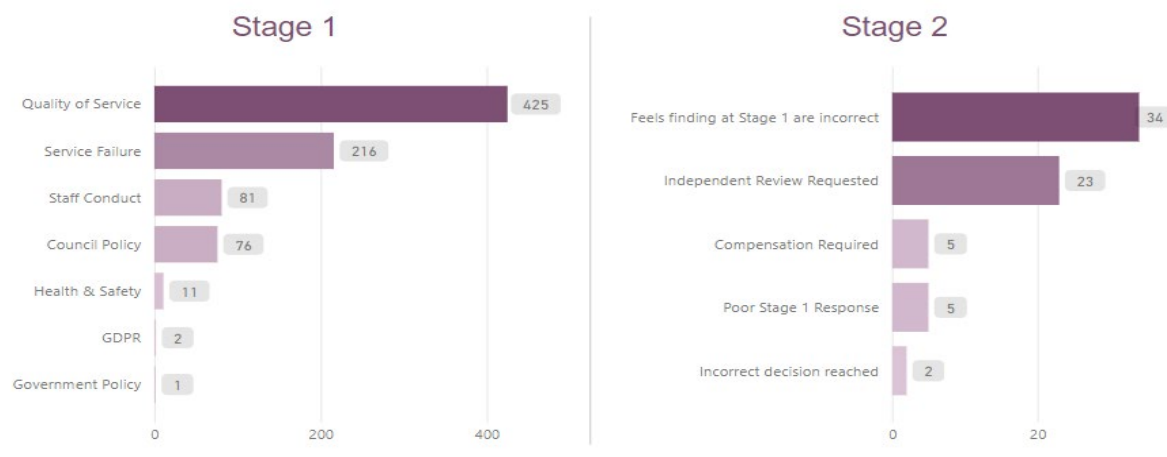
This section aims to show the high level themes across council departments in the last two years. The below table shows some of the main causes per theme.

Theme	Type of cause
Council error	Admin, process, account or data management, wrong information provided
Delay	Delay in processing or delivering a service, delaying in, or lack of communication
Service failure	Not providing a service
Policy	Council policy
Staff	Staff behaviour, attitude or approach
Quality	Poor standard of service provided
Communication	Lack of updates provided, poor response to emails or answering the telephones

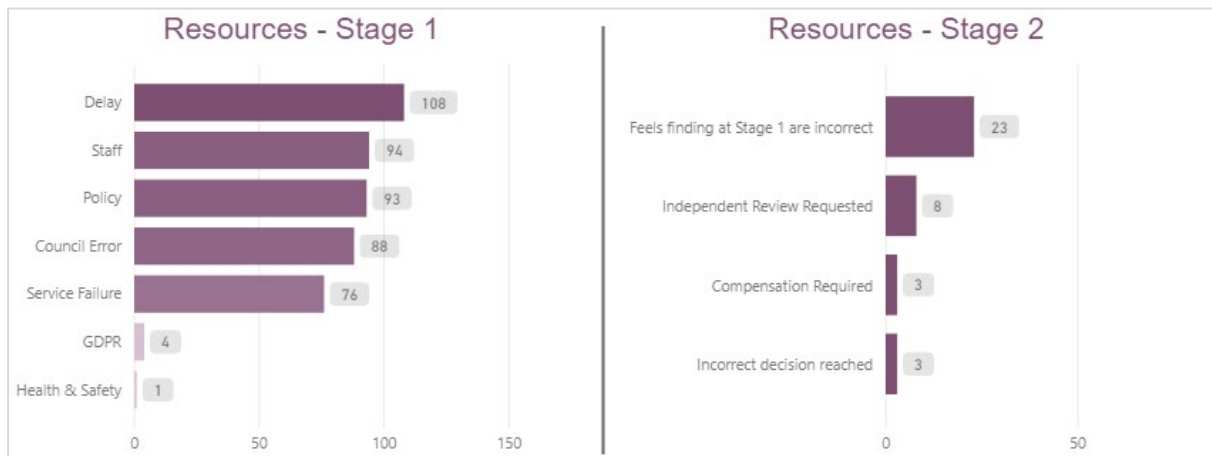
Place 2019/2020



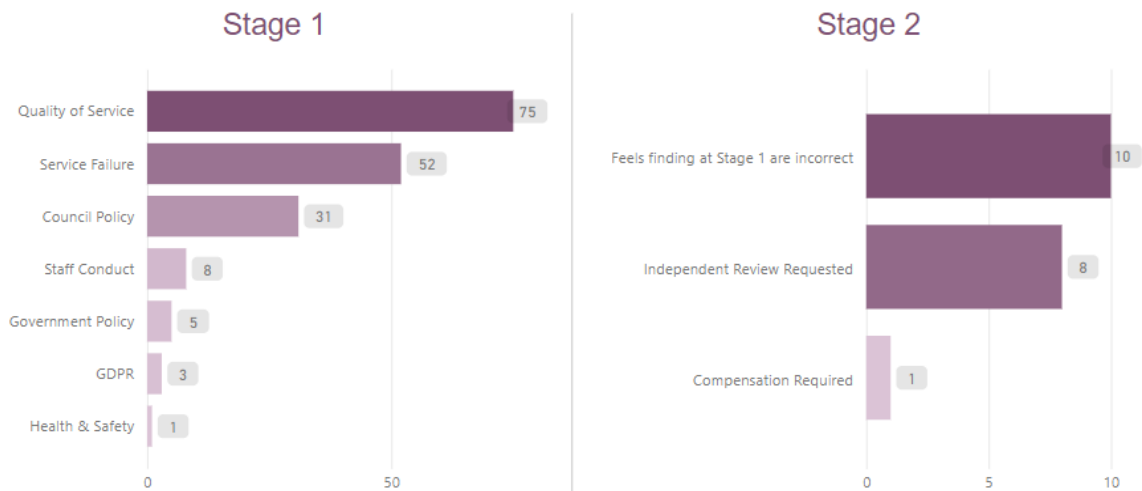
Place 2020/2021



Resources 2019/2020



Resources 2020/2021



5.1 To note the Council launched a new complaint handling system in May 2021 which made the processes of recording and managing complaints much simpler across the organisation. This provides wider access to staff members and increased the monitoring capabilities for individuals and services, as well as increased reporting capabilities.

6. BENCHMARKING:

6.1 The Complaints team attend the London wide complaints forums considering best practice issues and it contributes to the London Complaints Managers Group, which works with the LGSCO.

6.2 This group are developing benchmarking statistics across all services, which Croydon have already contributed to. This information is not yet available as it was put on hold due to the pandemic but Croydon remains committed to contributing to making the benchmarking data available to all.

6.3 The below table is a sample of other London Borough's complaints volumes during 2019/2020 that have been obtainable.

Borough	Population*	No of Stage 1 Corporate Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Corporate Complaints	Upheld Stage 1 Complaints	Number within borough SLA.
Brent	311,215	1710	239	752 (44%)	
Barnet	356,386	2,738	249	1,165 (42.5%)	2,182 (80%)
Croydon	363,378	3,426	212	2,236 (65%)	2,981 (87%)
Islington	206,125	2,529	137	1,285 (48%)	
Merton	199,693	860	80	585 (68%)	731(85%)

*population figures as of 2011 census

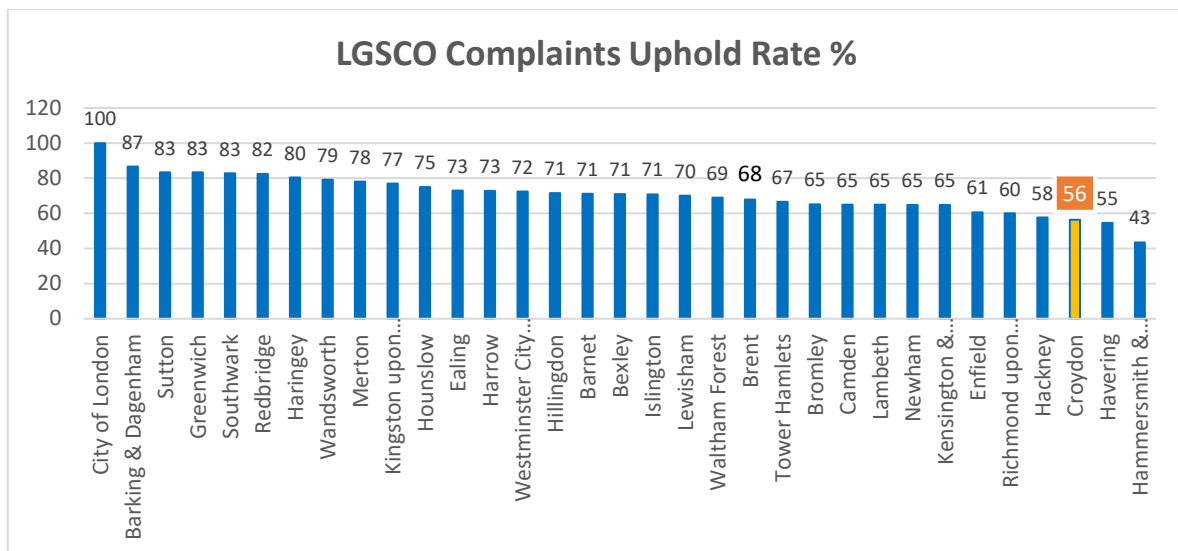
**All boroughs operate different complaints processes. Figures provided by LCMG (London Complaint Managers Group)

Borough	Population*	No of Stage 1 Corporate Complaints	Number of Stage 2 Corporate Complaints	Upheld Stage 1 Complaints	Number within borough SLA.
Barnet	356,386	1,957	215		
Croydon	363,378	1,325	128	570 (43%)	1,077 (81%)

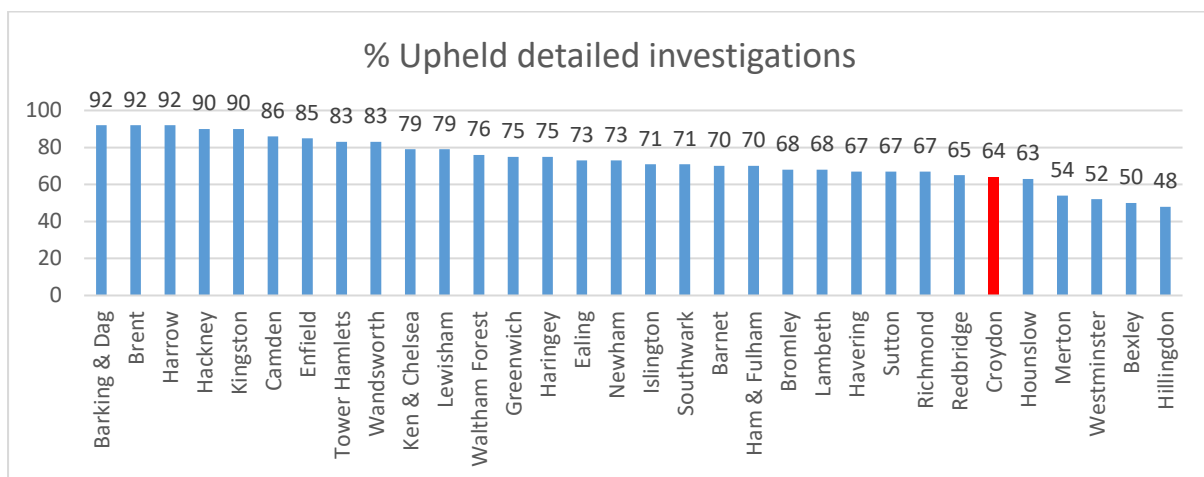
*population figures as of 2011 census

**All boroughs operate different complaints processes. Figures provided by LCMG (London Complaint Managers Group)

- 6.4 The Council has been unable to gather extensive statistics from other London Boroughs however benchmarking data has been provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021.
- 6.5 Of the detailed investigations undertaken in 2019/2020 the percentage of complaints which were upheld in favour of the resident (56%) compares favourably with other London boroughs, as can be seen in the chart below.

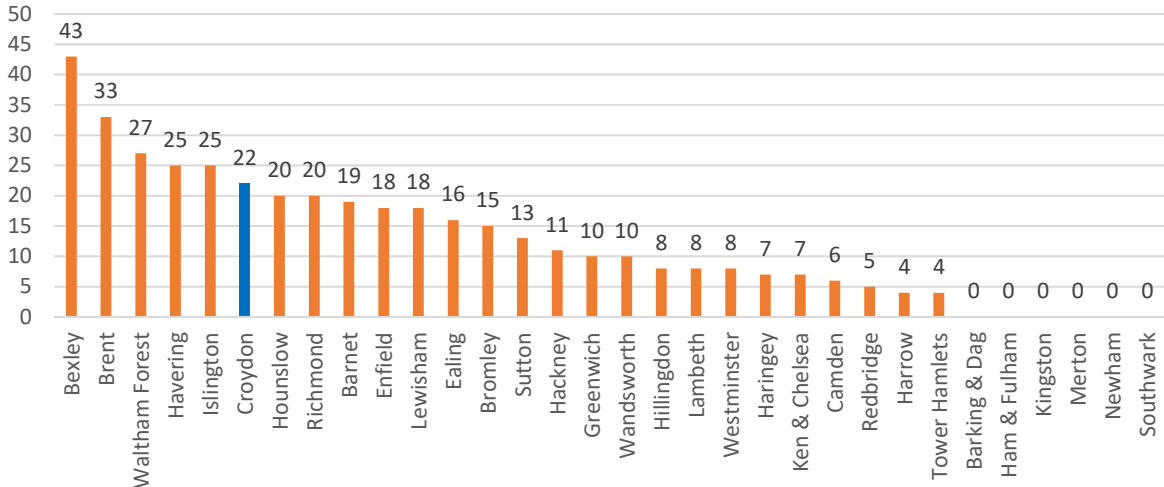


- 6.6 Of the detailed investigations undertaken in 2020/2021 the percentage of complaints which were upheld in favour of the resident (64%) again compares favourably with other London boroughs as can be seen in the chart below.



- 6.7 The Ombudsman found that a total of 22% of complaints referred for detailed investigation in 2020/21 had been remedied satisfactorily by the Local Authority in advance of their investigation. This compares favourably with other London boroughs as can be seen in the chart below.

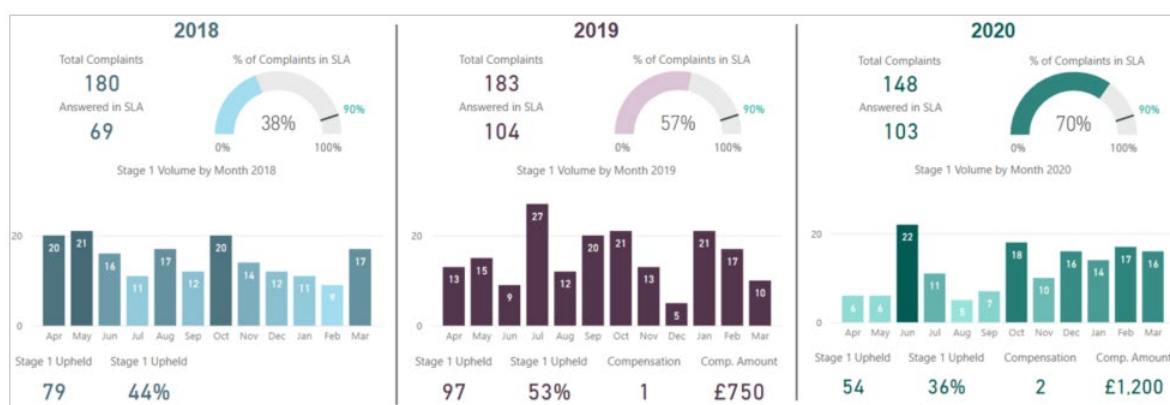
% Satisfactorily remedied in advance of LGSCO investigation



7. CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION (CFE) STATUTORY COMPLAINTS

Stage One

- 7.1 The volume of stage one complaints increased by 2% (3 complaints) in 2019/2020 compared to 2018/2019, but reduced by 20% in 2020/2021 (35 complaints).



- 7.2 There has been a year on year increase in response times over the two year period. This has improved from just 38% in 2018/2019 to 70% in 2020/2021.
- 7.3 36% of statutory stage one complaints were upheld in 2020/21, a decrease of 17% on 2019/2020, and 8% on the year before.
- 7.4 The service paid £1,200 compensation during 2020/2021, compared to £750 in 2019/2020.

Please note the compensation figure for Statutory Stage 1 complaints in 2018/2019 is not available due to restricted access to previous system.

Stage Two

- 7.5 The volume of stage two complaints increased by 1 complaint in both years following 2018/2019. There were a total of 9 received in 2020/2021.



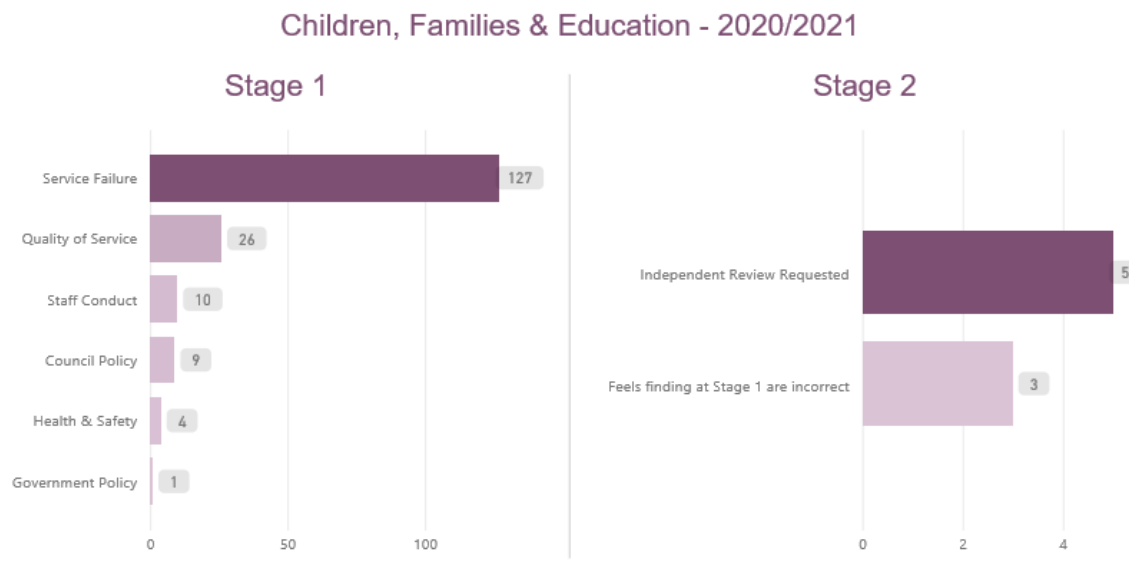
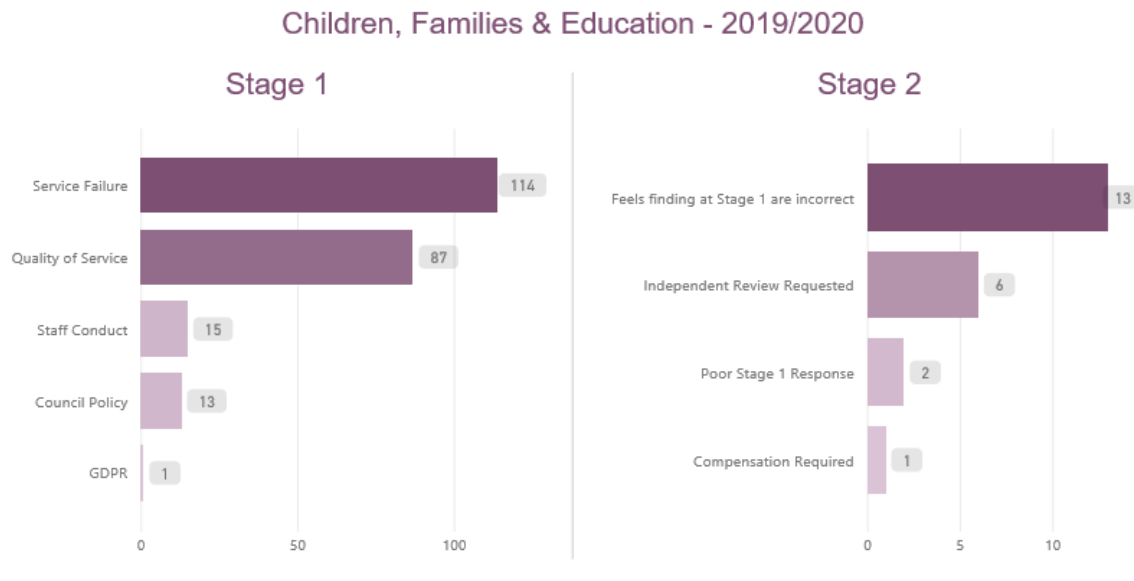
- 7.6 During 2020/2021 11% of stage two complaints were answered within the SLA timescale of 25 working days. This is an increase of 11% in comparison to 2019/2020, and a 3% decrease from 2018/2019.

Please note that the 25 working day time limit for response can be extended to a maximum of 65 working days.

- 7.7 33% of stage two, or 3 complaints were upheld during 2020/2021, compared to 50%, or 4 complaints in 2019/2020 and 43%, or 3 complaints in 2018/2019.
- 7.8 The service paid £4,942 compensation at Stage 2 during 2020/2021, compared to £400 during 2018/2019.

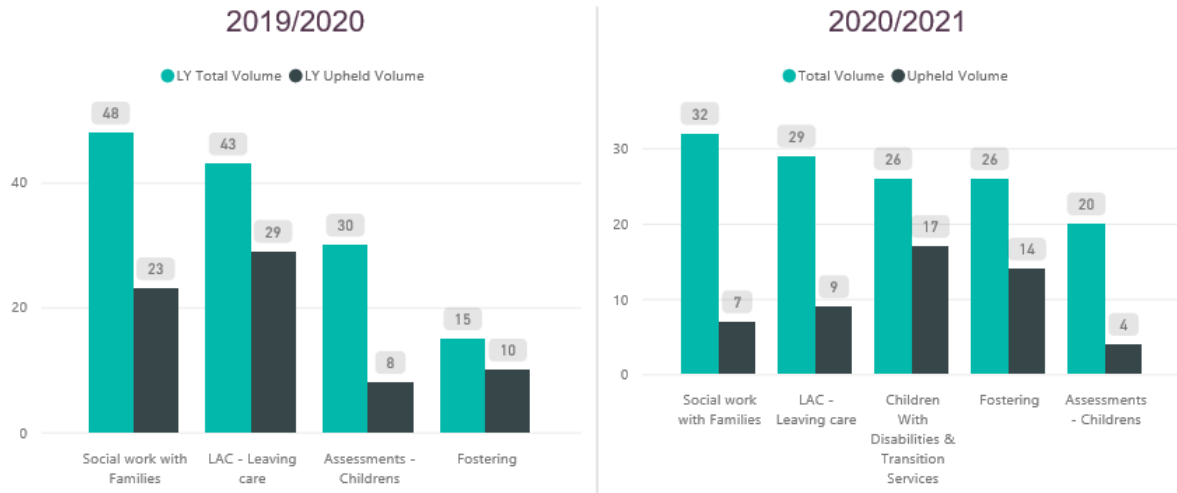
Stage Three

- 7.9 In 2020/2021 there were a total of 3 Stage 3 panels, an increase of 1 on 2019/2020, and the same number as in 2018/2019
- 7.10 The charts below show the Stage 1 Themes for CFE Statutory complaints in the years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021:



8. CFE STATUTORY STAGE 1 COMPLAINT VOLUMES BY SERVICE TEAM

- a. The below table shows the highest number of complaints received by service teams within the CFE division within the last 2 years.



- b. Social work with families received the greatest number of complaints in both years, however there was a reduction of 33%, or 16 complaints in 2020/2021 for this team in comparison to the previous year.
- c. There has been a reduction in the number of upheld complaints for the social work with families' team, from 48% in 2019/2020 to 22% in 2020/2021.

9. HEALTH, WELLBEING AND ADULTS (HWA) STATUTORY COMPLAINTS

9.1 Stage One



9.2 Stage one complaints increased by 50% or 44 complaints in 2019/2020 compared to 2018/2019, and increased a further 14%, or 18 complaints in 2020/2021.

9.3 There has been a year on year decrease in the percentage of complaints that have been upheld. 35% of Stage 1 complaints were upheld in 2020/2021, compared to 52% in 2019/2020 and 55% in 2018/2019.

9.4 There has been a year on year increase in the percentage of Stage 1 complaints that are answered within the 10 working day SLA. 47% were answered within SLA in 2020/2021, compared to 44% in 2019/2020 and 43% in 2018/2019.

9.5 No compensation was paid at Stage 1 in 2020/2021, compared to £268 compensation paid in 2019/2020 and £250 in 2018/2019.

Please note there is no Stage 2 process for Statutory Adults complaints

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

9.6 9 complaints were escalated to the LGSCO in both 2020/2021 and 2019/2020, compared to 4 in 2018/2019

9.7 3 complaints, or 33% were upheld by the LGSCO, a decrease of 1 on the period 2019/2020 and an increase of 1 on 2018/2019.

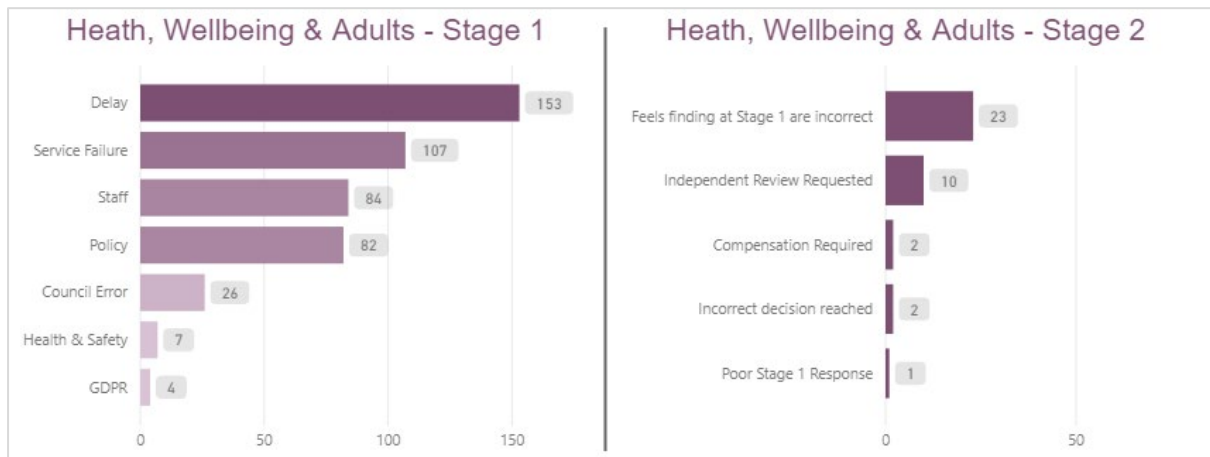
9.8 There has been an increase in the number of enquiries responded to within SLA from 44% in 2019/2020 to 67% in 2020/2021.

9.9 A total of £900 compensation was paid in 2020/2021 compared to a total of £350 in 2019/2020.

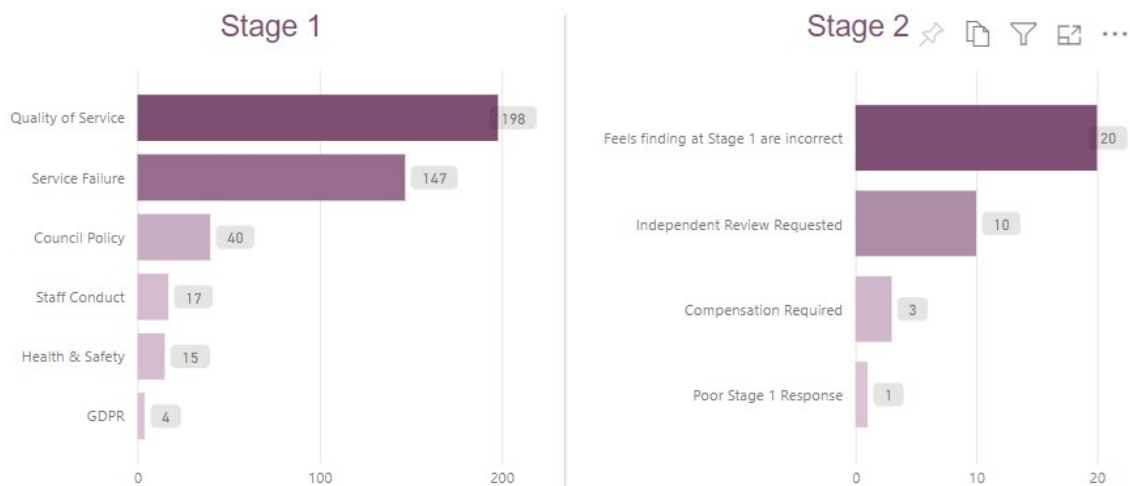
9.10 The tables below show the high level themes across the HWA department in the last two years.

Please note that there are a number of housing services that sit within the HWA department, which are incorporated within the below figures. These include both Statutory and Corporate complaints.

HWA – Complaint themes 2019/2020



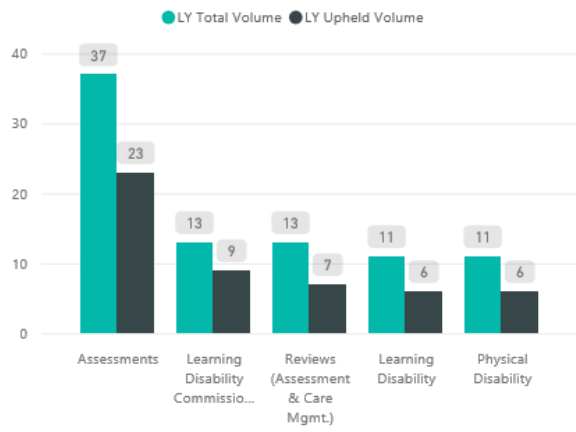
HWA – Complaint themes 2020-2021



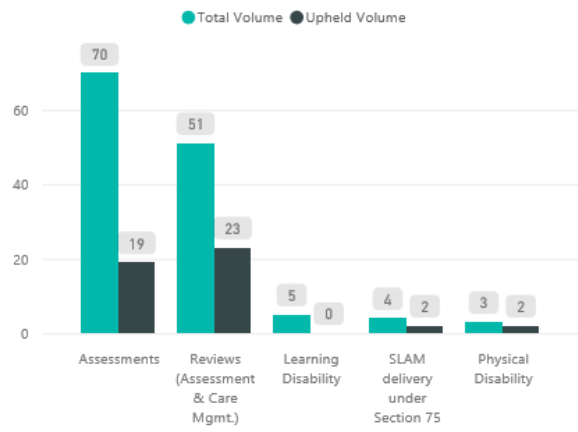
9.11 HWA Statutory: The graph below shows the top 5 areas of complaint by Service Team in the past 2 years.

9.12 There has been a change in the main reason for complaint, away from Delays, to Quality of Service.

2019/2020



2020/2021



10. COMMENTARIES FROM HIGH VOLUME SERVICES

CFE

Complaints Overview 2020/21

The vast majority of complaints fall under the category 'Failure to deliver a service'. This could be related to the impact of the pandemic over 2020/21 and also potentially to increased financial constraints. The themes confirm an increase in complaints in relation to Fostering and Care leavers in particular.

Specific complaints included:

- Placements and fostering – delays and discrepancies in payments for foster carers
- Lack of support and guidance for foster carers in relation to procedures
- Council policies and procedures regarding SGOs including support with housing
- Level of support for CWD
- Transition services for children with disabilities
- Lack of support for care leavers in relation to housing issues
- Delay in providing financial support and payments to care leavers

Themes in other services included:

- Fathers feeling 'out of the loop' or disengaged with their children;
- Concerns raised regarding the length of assessments, lack of clarity regarding the process and why it was required;
- Behaviour of individual social workers, and
- A relatively high volume of complaints made on behalf of children via advocacy services.

Areas of improvement and to work on:

There have been continued issues in relation to responsiveness and communication in relation to Stage One complaints. This has required follow up by the Children's Complaints Coordinator to provide reassurance that the service users' concerns were understood and being dealt with.

Requests for compensation by complainants for stress or inconvenience have also increased.

Regular (approximately monthly) meetings are held by Children's Complaints Coordinator with managers in each service areas to discuss the management of complaints. They also offer an opportunity to share advice on how to deal with complex and repeat complaints and best practice in responding effectively.

The Children's Complaints Co-ordinator also holds quarterly meetings with Children's Advocates to discuss the concerns being raised and avoid potential stage 1 complaints where possible.

Monitoring through weekly reports sent out within the service tree and including deadlines has also helped improve the monitoring of complaints and the timely allocation of complaints within each team. The quality of the response has also improved with a more detailed response being sent out to service users. Services are now liaising with the Children's Complaints Co-ordinator before and during a complaint and are discussing the complaints in more detail. The draft response is also sent to the Children's Complaints Co-ordinator to proof read and review prior to it being sent out.

The recent report and findings from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman regarding the Children's statutory complaints process will also have an impact on how we manage complaints, with evidence of more escalation to Stage 2 of the procedure, at the service user's request.

Actions:

- Meeting with Heads of Service in Children's services share the Ombudsman's report and implications for practice;
- Continued work with management teams to improve the quality of responses and best practice in structuring a response letter;
- Continued work with management teams through monitoring and support to improve the timeliness of responses.

ADULTS

Adult Social Care (ASC) has robust processes in place to manage and respond to complaints, MP enquiries and Councillor Enquiries. There is a dedicated officer who reports to a Head of Service overseeing the management of these tasks.

ASC complaints have remained around the expected level for the year – the slight increase can be attributed to the challenges presented by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Detailed records are kept and reported to senior managers weekly and monthly, which enables the service to quickly identify any new concerns or themes and respond appropriately.

If a more complex case requires an extension this is requested but they still show as overdue within the reporting. Senior Managers are briefed on these cases through the weekly reporting.

ASC has a good record of responding with the Service Level Agreement although there can be delays caused for example if a Safeguarding Section 42 enquiry is ongoing. The previous system struggled to identify these particular cases, however we are hopeful the new system will be more reactive.

Training is, and has been delivered to support all teams with the aim to increase the knowledge of the staff, how to appropriately respond to residents and elected representatives when they raise complaints.

There is now a programme of training sessions set on Croydon Learning commencing in July that will provide training as part of the induction for new staff and refresher courses.

Thematic review of complaints received identifies that communications, disputes in respect of provision, quality of provision and financial support provided by the Council are the most common issues raised by the public and or their elected representative.

Communications is an area that the whole department is working to improve, it must be noted though that the Pandemic has for obvious reasons added to challenges in this area.

The department is working hard to deliver the very best and appropriate care for our residents, but there will be inevitable and fundamental disagreement with some families, as to the right care for themselves or their loved ones. This does lead back to communications to ensure that as many residents as possible are made aware of what exactly the Council can provide, or support, and what contribution residents and/or their families will need and be expected to contribute.

The quality of provision is taken very seriously and any concerns raised are reviewed and escalated as appropriate.

The pausing of the LGO enquiries is now over. It does however mean that the data is skewed, demonstrating that in the latter part of the year we have received a great many more enquiries commencing, than the first half of the year. This is due to the LGSCO catching up on their backlog work. The numbers across the whole 12 months are similar to those in previous years.

We have only just moved to the new Complaints recording system and it is too early to know, what if any impact, either positive or negative will occur.

HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Overall the service dealt with 183 formal complaints which is a decrease of 40% on the previous year. 91 of these were about the quality of the service and 60 were related to service failures which was mainly delays in completing work or recurring issues that had not been resolved. Whilst the overall decrease would appear to be positive this could well be as a result of under reporting by both residents and staff. It is important when dealing with repairs reports that a distinction is made between those that are reports on a repair / service request and those that are a formal complaint. We did see within this an increase in complaints that were heating related and those relating to ongoing leaks not being resolved. Some complaints were also associated with delays due to Covid restrictions.

In addition the housing repairs service dealt with 191 Councillor and MP enquiries which was a large increase on the previous year. This trend has continued for the current year in Q1 and we are seeing a large increase in Councillor and MP enquiries. There is also an increase in complaints given the publicity around the issues at Regina Road, and ongoing service delays with some problems with contractor resources, and in some

trades such as plumbing, with all of this combined putting the service under enormous pressure.

Covid 19 and strict lockdown rules contributed heavily to the challenges faced by the service in many ways but particularly in regards to staffing levels and the works they were able to undertake.

This, along with severe staffing challenges has led to a large number of overdue cases. We have not been able to respond to complaints as quickly as we would have liked and acknowledge that residents have not been receiving the service we would like to deliver.

We are now recruiting to improve on resource within the service and have an action plan in place, as part of the Housing Improvement Plan for improvements to be made to deal with the backlog and incoming reports.

Improvements – these are reviewed continuously via the service improvement plan with Axis. Some key areas for 2020/21 have been:

- Additional work with Axis to reduce the number of recurring instances of leaks. Plumbers are having regular toolbox reminders of the need to correctly establish the cause of ongoing leaks and ensure these are followed up. This has also led to additional work on monitoring the number of callouts for these leaks on specific properties and blocks.
- More of the LGSR (gas servicing checks) being moved to the summer month on a cycle over the next 18 months which will assist with time availability of gas engineers during the winter months.
- Improved communication with the Gas Repairs, Service and Complaints teams within Axis to ensure service failures are reviewed with communication to the admin and operatives on what went wrong or right.
- Vehicle stocks monitored and reassessed weekly and monthly.
- Axis Gas Team now have a supplier App for parts to be ordered immediately from site and engineers are able to rebook next appointment from site whilst with the resident.
- Axis Gas Team co-located in the Suppliers offices in Croydon – greater access to materials on the day.
- The Domestic Gas Team have a new dedicated manager for Domestic Gas only and Adrian Ruddick joined Axis on 17th May 2021 with Stuart Simpson now moving to the Non Domestic Team to review all Sheltered and District Heating services across the contract.
- Increased Supervision has been put in place to assist with the day to day issues with operatives moved in to areas using a new IT solution
- Clearer guidance on the reporting of formal complaints to obtain a fair reflection of numbers and themes

REVENUES

Due to the impact of COVID 19 recovery or enforcement action was not carried out when residents or businesses fell behind with payment of Council Tax or Business Rates. . For the first 6 months of the year, recovery was paused and residents would not have received reminders. Also, as the courts were closed, we did not Summons anyone or seek Liability Orders to enforce payment. This type of action draws a large proportion of our complaints and without taking this action, complaint volumes reduced. We anticipate complaints increasing as we recommence our full recovery and enforcement processes.

The trends are quality of work, and delays due to increase in demand when the new bills are issued, that prevents revenues from dealing with the required action within a specific timeframe.

We continually update our working process and procedures and review performance of officers. Due to the human nature of our work there will be errors made, we look to mitigate this by increasing our online and automation offering.

As we start recovery and enforcement procedures again, and Summons residents for debt owed, we will anticipate an increase in complaints into the service. These residents tend to complain once they have been Summoned to court, we offer ample opportunity for engagement before this happens. However, given the nature of the queries dealt with, residents will inevitably complain about being Summoned to court for a debt that is owed and not paid, and as a result incur extra court costs.

TENANCY

There is no doubt that the pandemic and the Section 114 has had an effect on complaints this past year. The financial position of the council and the need for a restructure of services to tailor spending has meant that we have seen a reduction in services in areas like Grounds Maintenance, where prior to restructure, our green spaces on our estates would have been cut every 3-4 weeks, we are now seeing grass being cut every 10 weeks, sometimes longer. This has caused huge rise in complaints from residents unable to use their communal garden areas. In addition, waste services were severely impacted during the pandemic, which meant that many estates had multiple missed collections, creating a build up and left unattended for days on end. Our teams have also had a number of complaints regarding the repair service, in the first instance due to the first lockdown and going into residents homes, and in the second instance relating to financial restrictions that were put in place.

Repeated trends were around waste services, grounds maintenance and some caretaking services. At the onset of the pandemic the service risk assessed this, and anticipated that this would happen, and in most incidences complaints were upheld.

The service has identified the area's in which they need to improve and are working closely with Veolia and grounds maintenance to ensure that this happens. We are also increasing the Caretaker service and recruiting to the vacant posts, which we were unable to do for the past year.

The service anticipate that the publicity around Regina Road, will have an impact on complaints across the board.

Appendix A:

Upheld Ombudsman Complaints:

TEAM	LGO RECOMMENDATION
Council Tax	The Council failed to tell Ms X about the Valuation Tribunal when she disputed liability for council tax. Instead it took unnecessary and distressing enforcement action against her for two years. The Council wrongly told the Social Services Department of the council Ms X had moved to that it was investigating her for council tax fraud. This caused further distress. To put this right the Council should apologise to Ms X and pay her a financial remedy for the distress, time and trouble it caused. The Council should also tell the Ombudsman how it will ensure it properly handles council tax liability disputes in future.
Adults – Hospital Discharge	The Ombudsmen found fault with a Hospital Trust's communication with a patient's family about discharge arrangements. However, there was no fault with the decisions to discharge the patient back to her own home or subsequently to a rehabilitation placement. The Ombudsmen also found fault by a Council not completing a carer visit for 15-hours after the patient returned home. This caused the patient and her family distress. The Council and the Trust have agreed to the Ombudsmen's recommendations to ensure learning is taken from the complaint and ensure the faults do not happen again. They will also apologise to the complainant for the distress caused by the faults identified.
Housing Needs – Temporary Accommodation	Mr X complains the Council failed to carry out three suitability review requests and notify him of the decision. The evidence shows the Council carried out two reviews. One decision was sent to Mr X's solicitors and the other decision was sent but not received. Their failure to complete one review and delays in respect of the other two are fault. The evidence does not support Mr X's claim that he was unable to bid because of the fault in these cases. To remedy the injustice caused to Mr X as a result of the fault identified above the Council will apologise to Mr X and pay him £100 to recognise the distress caused.
Children's – Disability Service	There was fault in the Council's handling of a request for a care assessment, as it delayed completing the assessment for nearly four years. This has caused a serious injustice, which the Council has agreed to a financial remedy. It has also agreed to review its handling of the matter to determine the reason behind the delay.
Adults – Hospital Discharge	The Ombudsmen found fault by the Council and Trust with regards to the care and support they

	provided to a woman with ongoing health needs following her discharge from hospital. The Council and Trust will apologise to the woman's daughter and pay a financial remedy in recognition of the impact of these events on her.
Children's – Special Educational Needs	Mr X complains the Council failed to make the SEN provision specified in his son's Education Health and Care (EHC) Plan. He says the Council's actions have caused his family stress and expense in arranging private reports for a SEND Tribunal. The Council failed to make the SEN provision and delayed amending the EHC Plan, preventing Mr X from appealing to the SEND Tribunal against this. Although the Council will pay Mr X £100 now for his time and trouble in having to chase it, it will not be possible to properly assess the injustice to Z until the SEND Tribunal decides on his needs.
Environmental – Noise Pollution	Ms B complained about the Council's failure to respond properly and take effective action in response to her reports of noise nuisance and anti-social behaviour from her neighbour. Ms B says she suffered unacceptable levels of noise and anti-social behaviour for longer than necessary which affected her health and well-being. The Ombudsman has found delay by the Council but considers the actions it has already taken together with £100 and a review of procedure is enough to provide a suitable remedy.
Environmental – Missed Bins	The Council has repeatedly failed to collect Mr B's household waste and recycling causing inconvenience and expense. The Council has made a payment to Mr B but the Ombudsman has recommended an additional remedy for the injustice caused.
Parking - Enforcement	The complainant says the Council failed to note and act upon a change of address. The complainant says this resulted in enforcement agents clamping his car. The complainant missed a hospital appointment and took unplanned time away from work to visit the Council and resolve the dispute. The Council says it had used the wrong information, apologised to the complainant but did not consider any further remedy. The Ombudsman proposes finding the Council at fault and recommends a financial remedy.
Housing/Adults - Adaptations	The complaint is about a delay in completing disabled adaptations to a property the Council had found for the complainants to move to. And about a lack of updates. The Ombudsman upholds the complaint and has made recommendations.
Housing Needs – Transfer Register	The Council failed to take an application when Mr C approached it as homeless. Because Mr C's local connection lies elsewhere the Council would have ultimately referred him back to that

	<p>council even if it took an application from him, so the outcome would be the same. The Council has apologised and offered an appointment to assist should Mr C still need it. This is appropriate action in response. In addition to this I recommend the Council reminds its staff to keep adequate records of advice it gives, as it had no record of how it dealt with Mr C's approach.</p>
Council Tax - Summons	<p>Mr B, complains that following a long history of queries about council tax and benefits, the Council failed to recall a council tax debt from bailiffs when a special payment arrangement was put in place in August 2017. Bailiff action took place as a result, causing distress. The Ombudsman finds there was fault by the Council both in the recovery process and in its complaint handling. That led to injustice for Mr B, for which a remedy has been agreed.</p>
Housing - Repairs	<p>The landlord demonstrated inappropriate and unreasonable delay in providing a response to the resident's reports of mould at the property. Complaint about the landlord's response to the resident's reports of repairs required to the concrete area at the front of the property. The landlord acted appropriately in informing the resident that it was not responsible for repairs required to the concrete at the property and that she needed to apply for retrospective approval for the improvements carried out to the driveway of the property.</p>
Housing – Private Sector Houses in Multiple Occupancy	<p>Ms C complains about the way the Council dealt with her as the landlord of a property about hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. Ms C says she suffered unnecessary stress, costs and time and trouble in pursuing the matter. The Ombudsman has found fault by the Council but considers the agreed actions of an apology, £100 and service improvements provide a suitable remedy in addition to the actions the Council had already taken.</p>
Environmental – Missed Bins	<p>The complainant says the Council failed to collect his domestic refuse several times and gave inaccurate reasons for the failure. The Council says it recognised the faults and carried out supervision of its contractor to improve the service. It offered a financial remedy which the complainant found to be inadequate and after which he experienced further missed collections. The Ombudsman finds the Council acted with fault and recommends a remedy.</p>
Housing - Repairs	<p>In accordance with paragraph 23(i) of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme the complaint about the payment level of compensation awarded to Ms S following her insurance claim for damaged belongings is outside of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. In accordance with paragraph 42 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme there was service failure by the</p>

	landlord in respect of the complaint about the landlord's response to Ms S's reports of blocked drains. In accordance with paragraph 42 of Housing Ombudsman Scheme there was no maladministration by the landlord in respect of its handling of the complaint.
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Appendix B:

TEAM	LGO RECOMMENDATION
Anti Social Behaviour	<p>In accordance with paragraph 54 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme there was service failure by the landlord in respect of the complaint about its response to reports of ASB.</p> <p>In accordance with paragraph 55 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, the Ombudsman considers that the landlord has made redress to the resident which, in the Ombudsman's opinion, resolves the complaint with respect to complaint handling.</p> <p>While the landlord took appropriate action in response to the resident's reports of ASB, it failed to give him details of its progress in investigating these matters following his emails of July and October 2019. There was a lengthy delay issuing the stage one complaint response. The landlord subsequently offered redress that was proportionate to the detriment caused to the resident.</p>
Environmental – Missed Bins	<p>Mr X complains about missed bin collections. The Council accepts that due to incorrect information on its database the collections did not happen as they should have from August to November. It has taken action to resolve the problems and collections are now taking place regularly. A remedy for the frustration and inconvenience caused to Mr X is agreed</p>
Tenancy and Caretaking	
Adults – Assessments	<p>The Council was late in making some payments to the builders. However, it has now made all the payments due and has apologised to Miss B for the late payments.</p>
Adults – Finance	<p>Summary: Mrs F complains the Council issued late invoices for her husband's care and did not take into account his disability related expenses. The invoices were late and the Council failed to reply to one of Mrs F's complaints. We have found no fault in the Council's calculations. The Council has agreed to apologise and reduce the amount owed by £100 to acknowledge the time and trouble caused.</p> <p>Mrs F should continue with the repayment plan.</p>
Adults – Direct Payments	<p>The Ombudsman finds the Council included incorrect information in its assessment of Ms Y in June 2019 and then delayed in reviewing her needs thereafter. This meant that Ms Y went without the care she needed for longer than necessary, causing avoidable distress. The Council will apologise and pay £500 to Ms Y.</p>
Insurance	<p>The landlord's decision to not respond to the leaseholder's complaint about damage to the property's window, caused during grounds maintenance works, through its complaint procedure, was a missed opportunity to resolve the situation and not in line with the</p>

	Ombudsman's dispute resolution principle to be fair in all circumstances.
Private Sector Housing	Mr B complained about the Council restricting his contact with it, which he considers unfair and discriminatory. We find there was fault by the Council in failing to apply its policy or document having done so. The Council has agreed to our recommendation that it should issue an apology to Mr B and review its position in this matter.
Community Safety	The Council acted with fault in its response to Miss X's complaint on needing to move home due to risk of domestic violence. It apologised and provided Miss X with a financial remedy to acknowledge its delays. It also improved its services to allow Council staff access to housing records to reduce the risk of perpetrators being accommodated near domestic violence survivors. The Council provided an adequate remedy before the Ombudsman investigated.
Environmental – Missed bins	The Ombudsman found fault by the Council on Mr S's complaint of it failing to act effectively on reports of missed bin collections. The collection of missed waste was delayed. It failed to identify, and solve, the cause of missed collections promptly. It failed to monitor the problem and made errors when attempting to relocate parking bays. The agreed action remedies the injustice caused.
Adults – Day Services	Upheld in part concerning burn received by complainant using kitchen at Cherry Hub
SEN – Children's	The Council was at fault for delays in issuing a decision following an Annual Review and for providing the final Education Health and Care Plan, meaning Ms X had to wait longer to exercise her appeal rights. The Council was also at fault for the way it handled the complaint. The Council has agreed to remedy the injustice caused.
Adults – Assessments and Care Management	This complaint is upheld, in that there was delay by the Council in responding to queries on a financial assessment. The Council has already apologised and responded to the queries, which I consider is a satisfactory remedy to the complaint.
Care Planning Service – Children's	Miss Y complains about the remedy the Council offered in response to her complaint about its actions regarding the care of, and her contact with, her son. She says it does not properly address all the issues raised or the extent of injustice. The Ombudsman has found fault by the Council causing injustice. Its proposal does not meet our expectations, based on our published remedies guidance. The Council has agreed to remedy this by making a payment to Miss Y to reflect the distress, time and trouble its faults caused, issuing a fresh apology and refunding costs.