

CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Quarterly Report

Compliments, Complaints & Feedback

**For the period:
July – September 2021**

Introduction

This report from the Complaints and Feedback Team covers Q2 (July - September 2021).

This report brings together all compliments and complaints received by the council.

Together for Children (TfC) provide a six-monthly report on complaints regarding Children's Services, which is presented to the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee for detailed analysis. To ensure the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee has a complete overview of complaints made about council services, the report from TfC will be appended to the Compliments, Complaints & Feedback report in Q2 and Q4.

As TfC reports on a six-monthly basis it is not possible to include information in the quarterly graphs. However, where complaints are made to the Local Government Ombudsman regarding TfC they are included in the relevant Scrutiny report.

Sunderland Care and Support's report regarding complaints received about services will be appended to Compliments, Complaints & Feedback report on a quarterly basis.

The report also contains information about the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter to the council.

Part A of the report includes statistical data, which is presented in an updated, easy to view format.

Part B of the report provides information on the different Compliments and Complaints Procedures that are used by the council to handle customer feedback.

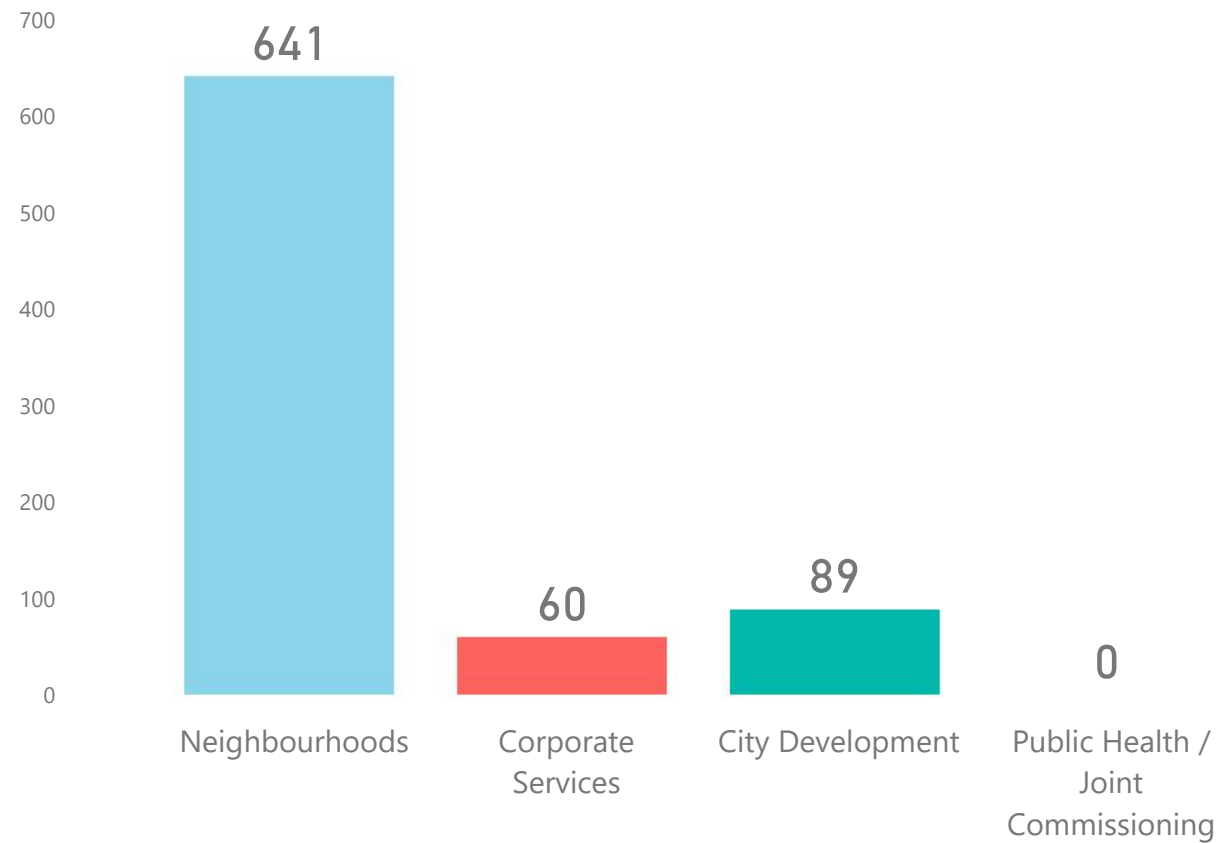
Part C of the report includes further information on each service area within separate appendices.

Complaints Overview

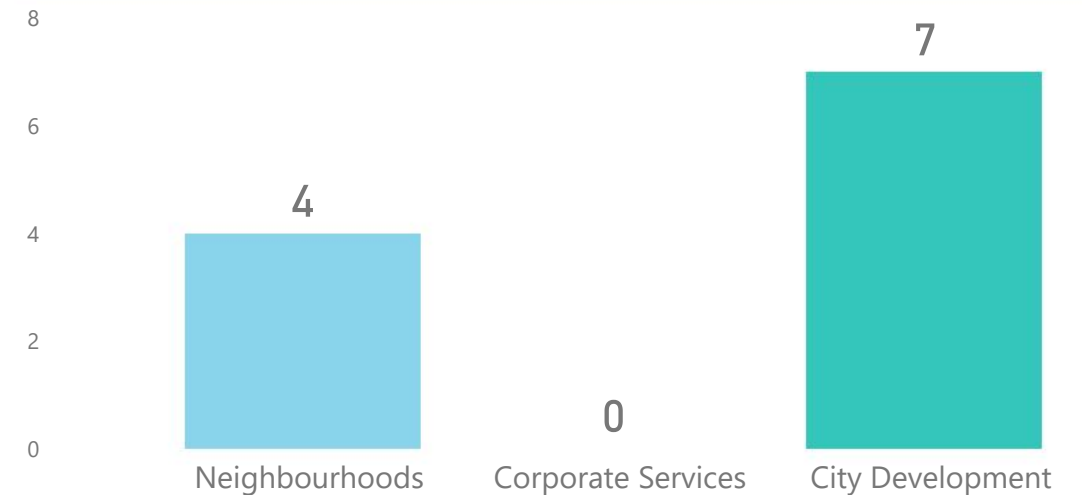
Ombudsman - 6



Corporate Stage One - 790

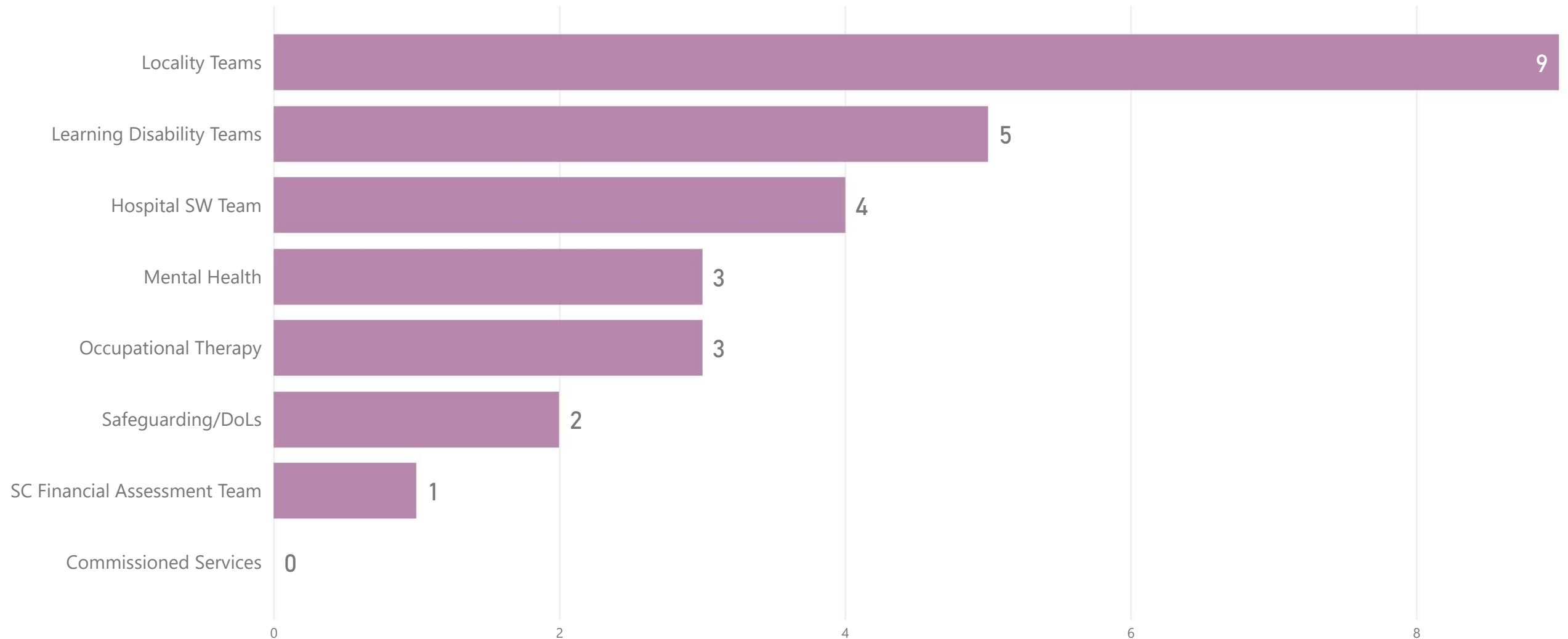


Corporate Stage Two - 11



Complaints Overview

Neighbourhoods - Adult Statutory Social Care - 27



Compliments

Compliments - 235

235

I would just like to pass on my thanks for all the help and support with the care plan. I found the worker very approachable, and she took time to explain fully what I could and couldn't use the care plan for. She was patient and never at any point made me feel a nuisance.

Very understanding and helpful member of staff when I called. This is exactly what people need when dealing with things as I was for an elderly parent.

Phoned up an hour ago and the sweeper was out and cleaned up the broken glass and sorted it straight away, brilliant service came out quick, cleaned up all the broken glass

Customer wanted to compliment her refuse team that consistently do a great job. They are friendly polite and courteous, and she wanted to let us know they are appreciated

The workmen have been today and made a great repair to the roadway. Thanks for getting this sorted in a timely manner

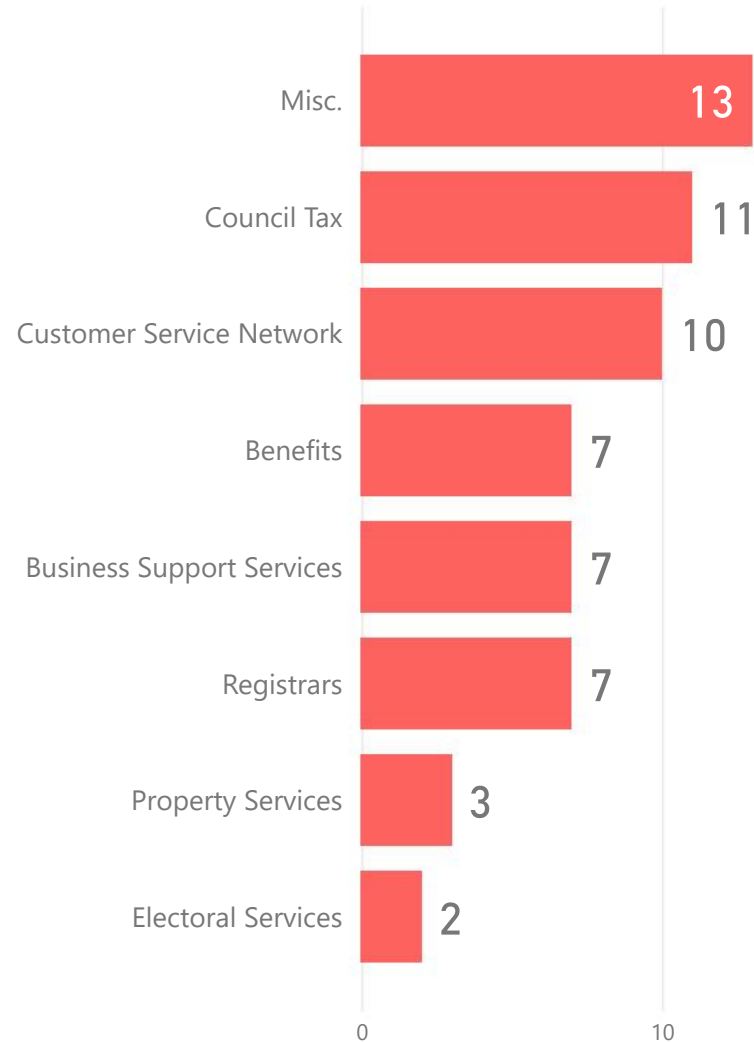
We firstly wanted to express our thanks for making our wedding service so lovely and personal, we know your must have done hundreds, but you made ours feel so special you are an absolute pro, thank you so much

Corporate Complaints Breakdown for Stage 1

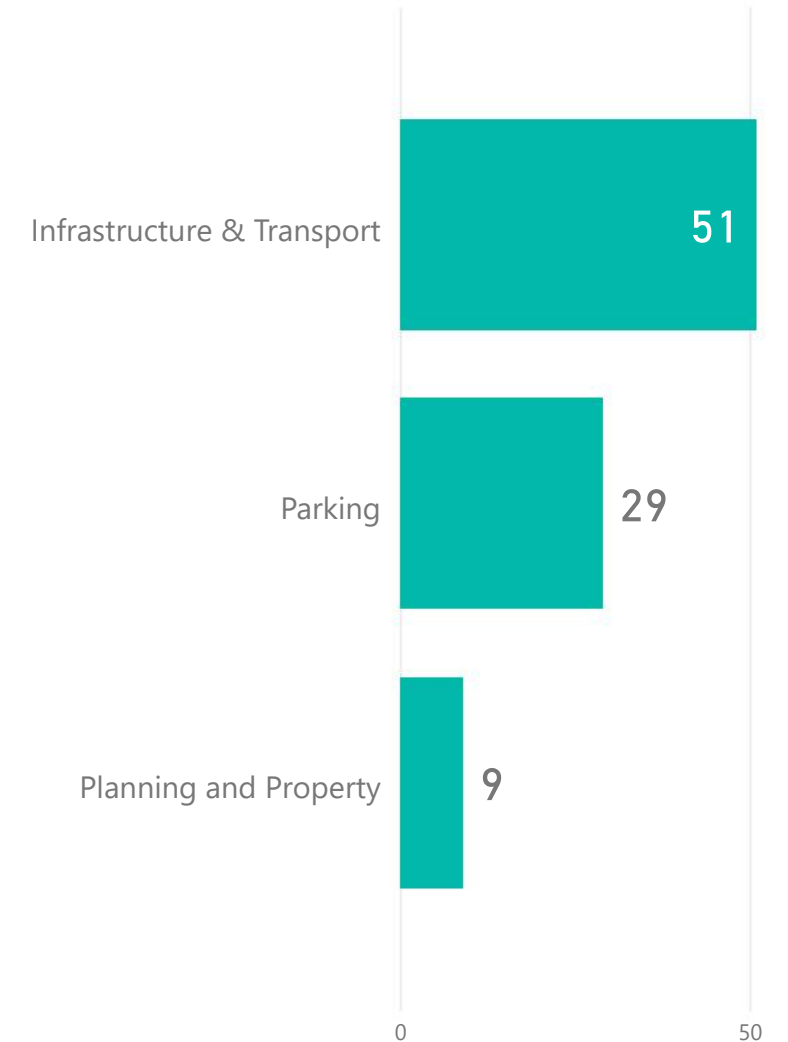
Neighbourhoods - 641



Corporate Services - 60



City Development - 89



PART B

Compliments

Compliments tell us what people like best about the services they receive. They also allow us to use this information to build those features into our services where possible and this helps us to continually improve levels of customer satisfaction. Compliments are logged centrally through the Complaints and Feedback Team.

Information on compliments is attached as **Appendix 1**

Complaints made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Ombudsman has a statutory responsibility for investigating complaints of maladministration about local councils. The Ombudsman will usually only consider a complaint after it has been through the council's complaints procedure and the customer remains unhappy. Complaints from the Ombudsman are made against the council including those about Children's Services.

Information about Ombudsman complaints is attached as **Appendix 2**

Corporate Complaints Procedure

How the procedure works:

There are two stages to the council's Corporate Complaints Procedure;

Stage One: These are dealt with by the relevant service area and should be completed within 25 working days. All responses advise the complainant that if they remain dissatisfied, they can refer their complaint to the Complaints and Feedback Team for review.

Stage Two (Review): Where customers remain dissatisfied with the response to their stage one complaint, they can request a review be undertaken by the Complaints and Feedback Team. Complainants are advised that, should they remain dissatisfied with the response at stage two, they can ask the Ombudsman to consider their complaint.

Information about Corporate complaints is attached as **Appendix 3.**

Statutory Procedures

Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure

Legislation & Regulations

The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 provides for a single complaints process for all health and local authority *adult social care services* in England.

How the procedure works:

There is one stage to the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure.

One Stage (Local Resolution by the Council): local resolution is about the council trying to resolve complaints quickly and as close to the source as possible. We acknowledge complaints within three working days and arrange for an appropriate manager to consider the issues and provide a response to the complainant.

Most complaints can be dealt with and resolved satisfactorily at the local resolution stage, however, if this is not the case, any unresolved concerns can be referred to the Ombudsman.

Information about Adult Statutory complaints is attached as **Appendix 4**

Sample of complaints received

At the previous Scrutiny Overview Committee, a request was made that future reports contain examples of the types of complaints received by the council. This would enable members to gain a sense of the content of the complaints, similar to what is already provided regarding compliments

A sample of complaints received is attached as **Appendix 5**

Sunderland Care and Support

Sunderland Care and Support is a Local Authority Trading Company, formed in December 2013, wholly owned by Sunderland City Council. The company has a board of directors appointed by the council (as the shareholder of the holding company).

Sunderland Care and Support offers care and support 24/7 to more than 6,000 vulnerable customers across a wide range of services including: Supported Living schemes for people with a Learning Disability, Mental Health needs; Autism or challenging behaviour; Day Services and Short Break care services; Intermediate Care and Reablement services; Sunderland Telecare; Community Equipment Service; and Home Improvement Agency.

How the procedure works:

Complaints are dealt with under the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure. Some eligible complaints may fall outside this procedure and these complaints are considered as a corporate complaint.

A report from Sunderland Care and Support regarding all complaints received and handled by the service in Q2 is attached as **Appendix 6**

Children's Services Statutory Complaints

Legislation & Regulations

Statutory regulations were introduced by the Department for Education in 2006 entitled '*Getting the Best from Complaints – Social Care Complaints and Representations Procedure for Children and Young People*' to deal with complaints and representations made to Children's Services by children and young people (the regulations and guidance cover complaints and representations made by children and young people).

On 1 April 2017 *Together for Children*, the new company responsible for Children's Services in Sunderland came into operation. The statutory duty to deliver services for children remains with the council, who commissions the company to deliver services.

How the procedure works:

There are three stages to Together for Children's Complaints Procedure;

Stage One: An emphasis is placed on local problem solving. Complaints are acknowledged within three working days and responded to within 10 working days (with a possible extension to 20 working days in total).

Stage Two: If dissatisfied a complainant can progress their complaint to stage two. An investigation is undertaken by an Investigating Officer who has not been involved with the case. An Independent Person must be appointed to oversee the investigation, and these are commissioned externally. Investigations should be completed within 25 working days, although an extension of up to 65 working days is allowed.

Stage Three: This is an Independent Review Panel, comprising of an independent chair and two independent panel members. A panel must take place within 30 working days of receiving the request from the complainant. If a complainant remains dissatisfied, they can request a further investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman.

A report from Together for Children regarding all complaints received and handled by the service in Q2 is attached as **Appendix 7**

Appendix 1: Compliments

Compliments tell us what people like best about the services they receive. They also allow us to use this information to build those features into our services where possible and this helps us to continually improve levels of customer satisfaction.

	2019-2020	2020-21	2021-22
Q1 - Apr-Jun	152	245	206
Q2 - Jul-Sep	176	210	235
Q3 - Oct-Dec	120	273	
Q4 - Jan-Mar	115	181	
	563	909	441

The table below shows the service areas where compliments were received during Q2

	Q2
Adult Services	28
Anti-Social Behaviour	5
Council Tax	1
CSN	101
Environmental Health	2
Environmental Services	64
Events / Derwent Hill / Active Sunderland	4
Highways / Network Management	5
Housing Benefits	2
Housing Options	3
Libraries	1
Misc.	6
Parking Services	1
Planning	1
Registrars & Bereavement	11
	235

A sample of compliments received in Q2

Adult Services

Customer wanted to pass on her thanks to all the workers involved in her care. She stated that they had worked very hard to support her and she would not have been able to make the transition from the care home without the 'brilliant support' that she has received. She stated that she is 'forever grateful' for all their support.

I have recently worked on a case with an Occupational Therapist and I just wanted to say how professional and helpful she is. She is very approachable and its apparent she is passionate about the families we work with.

I would just like to pass on my thanks for all the help and support with the care plan. I found the worker very approachable, and she took time to explain fully what I could and couldn't use the care plan for. She was patient and never at any point made me feel a nuisance.

Many thanks for your e-mail and quick responses. It is such a relief for me that mam is being looked after and is out of danger and my family really appreciate all the help you have given us over this very difficult period. Everyone has been totally professional and understanding of the situation. I will be forever in your debt.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Customer wanted to thank the ASB officer for the time and guidance given to their family.

Customer Service Network

The person who dealt with my blue badge application was courteous and patient.

Excellent service from worker regarding arranging tip slot

Very understanding and helpful member of staff when I called. This is exactly what people need when dealing with things as I was for an elderly parent.

The person I dealt with was a credit to Sunderland City Council - efficient, courteous, and extremely helpful.

The service I received from the lady I spoke to was first class she had all the information I required and dealt with me very sympathetically-- full marks!!

Helpful in the extreme, professional in the approach and considerate to my needs. Thankyou SCC

Helped sort out the mams housing benefit and council tax - she was very helpful and put my mind at rest

Customer rang and wanted to compliment staff on how helpful they were, they went the extra mile with her enquiry and feels they both should be complimented on the good job they do.

Derwent Hill

Just to say a big thank you to all the staff at Derwent Hill for a fantastic weekend, well beyond all expectations. All the staff were fantastic and very helpful the food was superb, the bar worked really well, and the weather was unbeatable. Everyone said they had the most fantastic time, and it was the best reunion they've been to. We are thinking of making it a regular annual event!

Environmental Services

Phoned up an hour ago and the sweeper was out and cleaned up the broken glass and sorted it straight away, brilliant service came out quick, cleaned up all the broken glass

We have just had the grass cut near our home. I must pass on my thanks for a job very well done. It makes the surrounding area look neat and tidy it is very much appreciated by residents. Keep up the good work and thanks to all involved

Customer would like to thank the drainage team for how quick they came out and they did a good job

Last night I reported fly tipping outside in my back lane. This afternoon two operatives came to remove it. They were most helpful and tried to ascertain whether there was any identifying evidence in the rubbish or an indication on where it had come from. They gave excellent customer service, they advised they would keep an eye out when they were in the area and also advised on reporting etc... thanks so much

Customer rang to say thanks to the team as he reported some graffiti on the wall in his street and he has come home today, and it is gone. He said that it looks like the graffiti was never there and they have done a brilliant job. He wanted to pass his thanks on.

Customer wanted to compliment her refuse team that consistently do a great job. They are friendly polite and courteous, and she wanted to let us know they are appreciated

Customer wanted to say the crew in her area have been fantastic especially through the pandemic

Customer would like to thank the crew that have been out to cut the trees back - they have done a fantastic job

Highways

The workmen have been today and made a great repair to the roadway. Thanks for getting this sorted in a timely manner

Housing Options

Can I take this opportunity to thank you and your team for supporting the family. This has been evidence of working positively in partnership with agencies for better outcomes for the family who are grateful of the support.

Libraries

The worker should be recognised for her quintessential customer service and genuine compassion to the regular customers.

Registrars

We firstly wanted to express our thanks for making our wedding service so lovely and personal, we know your must have done hundreds, but you made ours feel so special you are an absolute pro, thank you so much

Thanks again for conducting our wedding ceremony - it was a beautiful service

Appendix 2: Complaints dealt with by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

There were 6 complaints concluded by the Ombudsman for Q2. The table below shows the number of complaints together with comparative data for the previous year.

	<i>Number of complaints 2019-20</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2020-21</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2021-22</i>
Q1	6	4	4
Q2	11	1	6
Q3	6	7	
Q4	15	7	
	38	19	10

The table below shows the number of complaints concluded in each quarter for each Directorate.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
City Development	2				2
Corporate Services	-	1			1
Neighbourhoods (Adult Social Care)	-	2			2
Neighbourhoods (other)	-	1			1
Together for Children	2	2			4
	4	6			10

The table below shows the total number of complaints received for each Directorate to date, how many of those complaints the Ombudsman chose to investigate; and from those investigations how many were upheld.

	Total Complaints made to the Ombudsman	Number closed after initial enquiries	Number Investigated by Ombudsman	Outcome of Investigation	
				Number upheld	% upheld rate
City Development	2	2	-		100%
Corporate Services	1	1	-		
Neighbourhoods (Adult Social Care)	2	1	1	1	
Neighbourhoods (other)	1	1	-		
Together for Children	4	1	3	3	
Total	10	6	4	4	

The Ombudsman's reference is included in brackets and the full report can be found on their website; www.lgo.org.uk

Detailed Investigations in Q2 (2)

Together for Children (20 007 406) – a complaint that the Council had failed to offer an appropriate remedy after it had upheld a complaint that a child had been left without care and support for over three years.

Outcome: *Upheld – maladministration and injustice.* The Ombudsman found that the whilst the Council had upheld the complaint, the remedy it had offered did not reflect the level of injustice caused.

Remedy Action: The Council has agreed to pay an increased amount of compensation.

Adult Services (20 006 211) - a complaint that the Council failed to correctly assess charges for home support services and that the assessment of Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) was flawed.

Outcome: *Upheld – maladministration and injustice.* The Ombudsman found that the Council was at fault for failing to properly consider whether going out for a meal was a DRE based on an eligible need.

Remedy Action: The Council agreed to offer its apologies; complete a retrospective review on whether there was an eligible need; remind staff about the need to consider the support plan when assessing DRE; review the charging policy in light of the Ombudsman findings.

Appendix 3: Corporate Complaints

Stage One

The table below shows the number of Stage One corporate complaints together with comparative data for the previous two years. These are all complaints received and not all will be upheld or partially upheld.

	<i>Number of complaints 2019-20</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2020-21</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2021-22</i>	<i>% change from same period last year</i>	<i>% responded to within timescale</i>
Q1	704	636	807	+27%	97%
Q2	770	804	790	-2%	94%
Q3	684	560			
Q4	502	689			
	2660	2689	1597		

The 790 complaints received this quarter are broken down into Directorates in the table below.

	City Development	Corporate Services	Neighbourhoods	Public Health/ Joint Commissioning	Total
Q1	94	67	646	0	807
Q2	89	60	641		790
Q3					
Q4					

Neighbourhoods

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Environmental Services	603	600			
Libraries	0	1			
Access to Housing	9	6			
Anti-social Behaviour	8	10			
Welfare Rights	2	0			
Public Protection	19	18			
Events	1	4			
Misc.	4	2			
	646	641			

Environmental Services

Complaints in respect of Environmental Services make up 94% of the complaints made against the Neighbourhoods Directorate this quarter. The table below provides a breakdown of the service areas within Environmental Services. These are all complaints received and not all will be upheld or partially upheld.

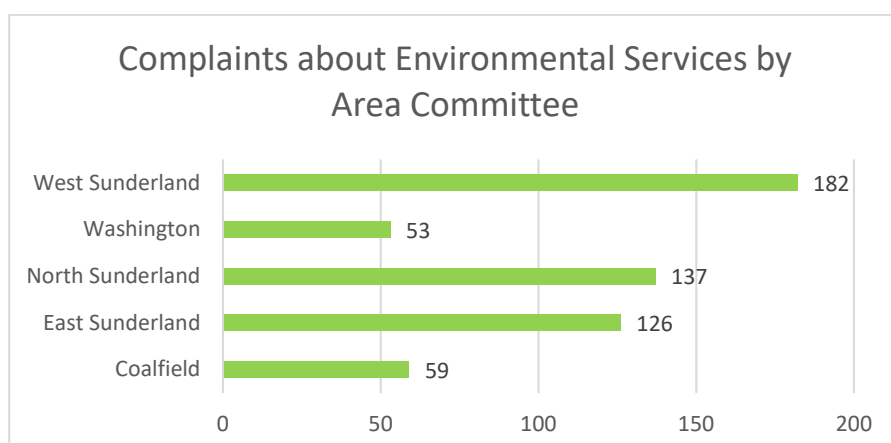
Environmental Services	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Refuse: <i>non/late delivery of bins & caddies/missed bins</i>	477	468			945
Bereavement: <i>maintenance of cemeteries/ crematorium</i>	8	10			18
Street Cleaning: <i>fly tipping/dog bins</i>	76	73			149
Trees, fixed play, trade waste: <i>grass cutting/ tree pruning</i>	17	23			40
Enforcement: <i>Fly tipping/littering/dog fouling</i>	14	10			24
Waste Management: <i>Beach Street Depot – staff attitude/permits</i>	11	16			27
	603	600			1203

Refuse Complaints

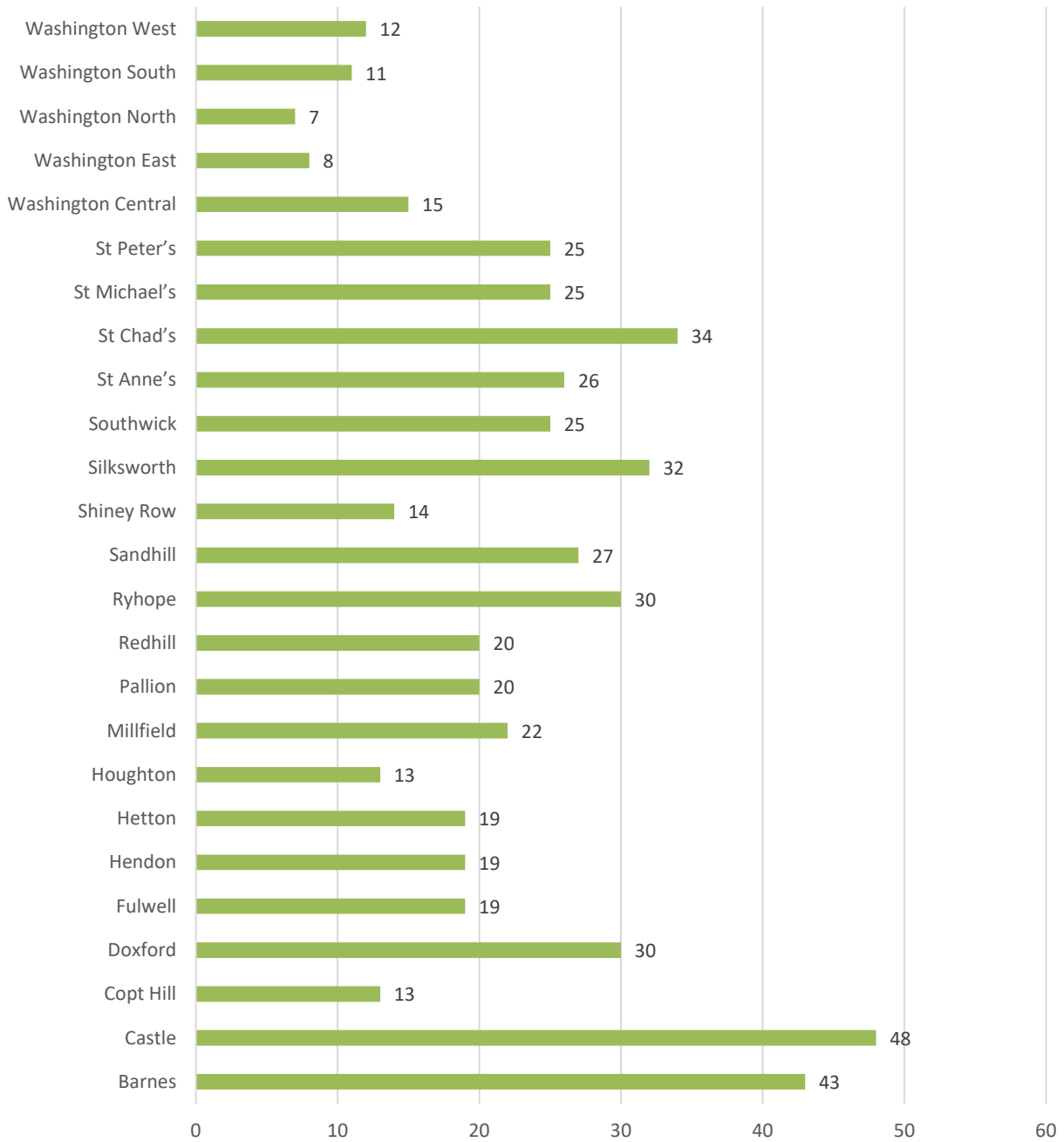
Of the 600 complaints received for Environmental Services, 468 (78%) were about issues to do with refuse collection. This should be viewed in context; in any quarter the council will service approximately 1.6 million containers, therefore this number of complaints represents only 0.03% of activity for this service area. The table below contains a breakdown of complaints about refuse. These are all complaints received and not all will be upheld or partially upheld.

	<i>Number of Complaints for 2019/20</i>	<i>Number of Complaints for 2020/21</i>	Number of Complaints for 2021-22	% change from previous year
Q1	433	419	477	14%
Q2	464	519	468	-10%
Q3	454	340		
Q4	232	398		
	1583	1676	945	

At a previous Scrutiny Coordinating Committee, a request was made by Members for information to be provided about Environmental Services complaints by Ward area and by Area Committee. Tables including this information are set out below.



Complaints about Environmental Services by Ward



City Development

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Planning & Property	11	9			20
Infrastructure & Transport	49	51			100
Parking	34	29			63
	94	89			183

Planning & Property

Complaints about this service area were regarding issues to do with general Planning issues, failure to follow processes, enforcement action.

Infrastructure & Transport

Complaints about this service area were regarding road resurfacing, footway repairs, traffic calming/restrictions and potholes.

Parking

Complaints about this service area were regarding car parks, the actions of the Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO), and lack of communication and Parking Permits.

Corporate Services

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Council Tax	9	11			20
Customer Service Network	25	10			35
Benefits	6	7			13
Property Services	4	3			7
Business Support Services	2	7			9
Registrars	5	7			12
Electoral Services	2	2			4
Misc.	14	13			27
	67	60			127

Council Tax

Complaints about this service area were regarding general issues about Council Tax, incorrect information, Business Rates, payment issues and wrong action taken.

Customer Service Network

Complaints regarding the Customer Service Network (CSN) make up 17% of complaints made during this quarter. Again, the number of complaints should be viewed in context. The CSN handled 360,690 contacts this quarter; 10 complaints represent a dissatisfaction rate of 0.002%. Complaints about this service area were regarding staff attitude, lack of communication and general issues around contact.

Stage Two - Review

Where customers remain dissatisfied with the response to their stage one complaint, they can request a review be undertaken by the Complaints and Feedback Team. 11 Reviews have been concluded in this quarter.

The internal timescale for completing Reviews is 25 working days. More complex cases may require further time to complete with the aim of within 65 working days.

Stage 2 Reviews	<i>Number of Reviews 2019/20</i>	<i>Number of Reviews 2020/21</i>	Number of Reviews 2021/22	% responded to within 25-day timescale
Q1	5	3	5	60%
Q2	7	6	11	73%
Q3	8	5		
Q4	11	7		
	31	21	16	

The reviews were in respect of services within the following Directorates;

Directorate	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	<i>Comparison Figures for previous year 2020/21</i>
City Development	3	7			10	10
Corporate Services	0	0			0	7
Neighbourhoods	2	4			6	4
	5	11			16	21

Outcome of Stage 2 Reviews

Complaint Outcomes	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	<i>Comparison Figures for previous year 2020-21</i>
Upheld in full	1	-			1	2
Upheld in part	-	5			5	6
Not Upheld	2	6			8	13
Unsubstantiated	1	-			1	-
Not Eligible	1	-			1	-
Withdrawn	-	-			-	-
	5	11			16	21

Reviews partly upheld in Q2 (5)

Refuse – *a complaint that the refuse crew were failing to empty bins on several occasions despite previous contacts and that there had been a lack of communication.*

Outcome: The review found there had been a lack of communication and this element of complaint was upheld. However, when bins were not emptied it was due to the refuse crew not being able to access them, rather than them simply being missed in error, therefore this part of the complaint was not upheld. The council has now clarified with the customer how bins are to be presented for collection in future.

Refuse – *the customer was unhappy with the attitude of workers at a recycling site regarding correct permits for his vehicle.*

Outcome: The workers at the recycling site had correctly applied procedure. Unfortunately, the customer had been provided with the incorrect permit for his type of vehicle and this had been done to an error on the council's website. The website has now been corrected so this does not happen again.

Parking – *the customer was unhappy with parking issues and the consultation process regarding permits.*

Outcome: The review could find no evidence of procedural fault on the part of the council but there had been a lack of communication with the customer from the Complaints Team and that element of the complaint was upheld.

Planning – *a complaint regarding the legal fees charged for a 106 agreement and delay in receiving responses*

Outcome: The elements of complaint about the planning decision and legal fees were not upheld, however an element about a delay in responding to emails was upheld.

Enforcement - *a complaint that the council had failed to follow correct process when issuing a Fixed Penalty Notice and a lack of signage to advise dog walkers about the prohibited area.*

Outcome: one element of complaint was upheld regarding the Warden not specifically advising the customer that they were issuing a Fixed Penalty Notice for the offence. However, the review found there to be no injustice caused and the other elements of the complaint were not upheld.

Appendix 4: Adult Social Care

The table below shows the number of complaints received in Q2 regarding adult social care services, together with comparative data for the previous two years.

	<i>Number of complaints 2019-20</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2020-21</i>	Number of complaints 2021-22	<i>% change from same period last year</i>	<i>% responded to within timescale</i>
Apr-Jun	24	10	18	+80%	56%
Jul-Sep	21	15	27	+80%	37%
Oct-Dec	20	32			
Jan-Mar	16	19			
Total	81	76	45		

The complaints were about the following issues;

Nature of Complaints	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	<i>Comparison Figures for pervious year 2020-21</i>
Actions of worker	1	4			5	17
Assessment Disagreement	2	8			10	4
Care Practice Issues	3	1			4	8
Communication	2	4			6	9
Delay	2	4			6	4
Equipment Issues	-	-			-	1
Finance	3	5			8	14
Lack of Choice	2	-			2	0
Quality Issues	3	1			4	8
Actions of residents	-	-			-	1
Lack of help/support	-	-			-	10
	18	27			45	76

The complaints were made regarding the following service areas;

Service Area Involved	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	<i>Comparison Figures for pervious year 2020-21</i>
Mental Health Service	1	3			4	11
Hospital SW Team	3	4			7	5
Learning Disabilities Service	-	5			5	9
SW Locality Teams	9	9			18	21
Occupational Therapy Service	2	3			5	8
Financial Assessment Team	-	1			1	4
Commissioned Services	3	-			3	17
Financial Safeguarding Team	-	2			2	-
Safeguarding Adults/DoLs	-	-			-	1
	18	27			45	76

Outcome of complaints

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Comparison Figures for previous year 2020-21
Upheld in full	3	4			7	13
Upheld in part	3	10			13	12
Not Upheld	6	8			14	35
NE/WD/OTH**	5	2			7	14
Ongoing	1	3			4	2
	18	27			45	76

**not eligible/withdrawn/other

In Q2 there were 4 complaints that were upheld in full and information about these are included below.

- The complainant stated they had not been informed about the charges for a care package put in place following a discharge from hospital*

The investigation could not determine whether the customer had been provided with information regarding charges at the time. It was therefore agreed that those charges would not be applied until the date the complainant was first made aware of them. Apologies were offered for the lack of clear information.
- A complaint that monies had been taken from a bank account in error.*

The investigation found that the council had requested a bank to close an account belonging to a service user who the council acted for and this was a legitimate action. However, the account number provided was incorrect and belonged to the service user's father, both of whom have the same name. When the error was highlighted the bank replaced the monies into the account and the council offered its sincere apologies together with a sum of compensation to acknowledge the time and trouble caused by the error.
- A complaint there had been no explanation that financial charges would apply while a relative was in hospital.*

In reviewing the information that had been provided to the customer at the time, the investigation found that, unfortunately an out-of-date information sheet had been provided. This did not specify that charges would apply for residential places when an individual was in hospital. Apologies were offered that the charging policy had not been explained correctly.
- A complaint there had been a delay in considering an Appeal re: finance issues.*

The investigation found that the Appeal had taken longer than expected. The delay was due to a number of factors including the complexity of the case which required officers to gather information covering a period of several years. Officers also needed to consult with various internal council departments and sought legal advice in relation to the case, thus contributing to the overall length of time it has taken to come to a decision on the appeal. The council offered its sincere apologies for the delay.

Appendix 5: Complaints

A sample of stage one complaints received in Q2 is included below. Outcomes for the complaints varied from not upheld, partially upheld and upheld.

City Wide Services

Website for bookings at refuse depot freezes between pages and will not allow input. Took 35 mins to make online booking after repeated attempts.

Customer was turned away at the tip today because he did not have a permit for his car. He was not aware you needed one.

Council Tax

Customer said she gave correct information at the time the property was sold, and we have taken too long to get back to her with a bill.

I moved into my house 4 months ago it has not been council tax banded yet because one of your departments has not sent the property file to the valuation office. But when I try to speak to someone on the phone nobody knows who deals with it.

My case has not been looked at on my own individual personal circumstances. My appeal was declined within seconds so was not looked into properly.

Customer Service Network

Customer is not happy in the delay with the blue badge process.

Customer feels certain members are releasing the call the moment people get through after waiting 15/20 minutes to speaks to someone. Happened twice now in one day.

Environmental Health

Failure to treat Rat Infestation - environmental health officer attended and promised a return visit to update customer and to send letters to all residents warning about Rat Infestation. This has not happened.

Neighbour's property backing onto customer's has a wasp's nest. Her neighbour has made an appointment for the council to treat but the next available date was 3 weeks' time. She isn't happy with this time scale as she is unable to open her windows as the wasps are getting into her property.

Environmental Services

Customer would like to know why the Pier is always closed when the sea is calm. He has been down today, and the sea is as flat as a mill pond. Shields and Seaham piers are open.

The toilets in Barnes Park have been closed at 3.40pm every day, customer has small children the park is so busy, and she is having to take the children home.

Customer has an ongoing problem with the garden waste service his bin has been missed on most days since he signed up for the scheme.

Every week in my area during bin collections I find not just my bins but neighbours bins too being left in inappropriate places. We don't leave our bins on the roads or lawns before the bins are collected and emptied, so why return them there.

Customer reported last month that there was a big overgrowth over a lamppost and totally blocking light out, it is practically covering lamp, no works has been done and customer hasn't had any call for an update.

Highways

Lack of action regarding community safety and no traffic calming measures in place or CCTV in use on the estate, lots of problems in Sunderland north.

The closure of two main roads into Sunderland from Washington on Saturday (A1231 and A1290 old Washington Road) on what was going to be a busy match day. It led to utter chaos on the roads, huge, huge tailbacks and many people either late for the match - or many who didn't make it at all.

Housing Benefits

Customers amount of Housing benefit keeps changing.

Delay in processing appeal.

Very unhappy that Test and Trace payment can take 3 weeks to be processed.

Parking Services

Customers advised that some of the charge points are not working in the car parks/not accessible, customer is frustrated that he can't access it or charge his car.

I would like to know why a permit zone was not activated for the event at Stadium of Light. We have these permit zones and have to apply for permits to park outside our own homes, yet they were useless last night when roads were and people unable to park.

The parking payment meter in High Street was refusing to take coins. Usually in these circumstances I would leave a note but given that you can now pay by phone I registered on the app and paid. I was disgusted to find that it cost me 50 pence extra to use the app. I did not see anything to warn me about this. It's a small amount but I am annoyed that I did the right thing and was penalised.

Planning

We have not been contacted by the council regarding the proposed use of adjacent land being used as a car parking area on which work has already started.

I am looking to do an extension on my bungalow, however although the architect submitted the plan to your planning department, she has still not received a response. She has chased this on several occasions and been advised that a response would be forthcoming but as yet no answer has been provided.

Property Services

Customer is raising a complaint about the lifts in the car park at Marks and Spencer's - they weren't working, and customer was forced to use the stairs to get access back to her car whilst having shopping.

Seafront railings desperate for painting. Been left primed for months and forgotten about. Big selling point is the seafront and not getting looked after.

Registrars

The crematorium was NOT open yesterday. I was there from 12.00 until 13.00 no one came to open the remembrance hall.

The customer purchased a fast-track certificate and this was posted out 1st class, but it has never arrived.

Appendix 6: Sunderland Care and Support Care

REPORT TO SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

SUNDERLAND CARE AND SUPPORT LIMITED (SCAS)

COMPLIMENTS & COMPLAINTS Q2 2021-22 (JULY-SEPTEMBER) UPDATE

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update to Sunderland City Council's Scrutiny Coordinating Committee on recent performance activity in relation to SCAS compliments and complaints.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Council's Scrutiny Coordinating Committee are requested to note the contents of the report.

3 OUR APPROACH

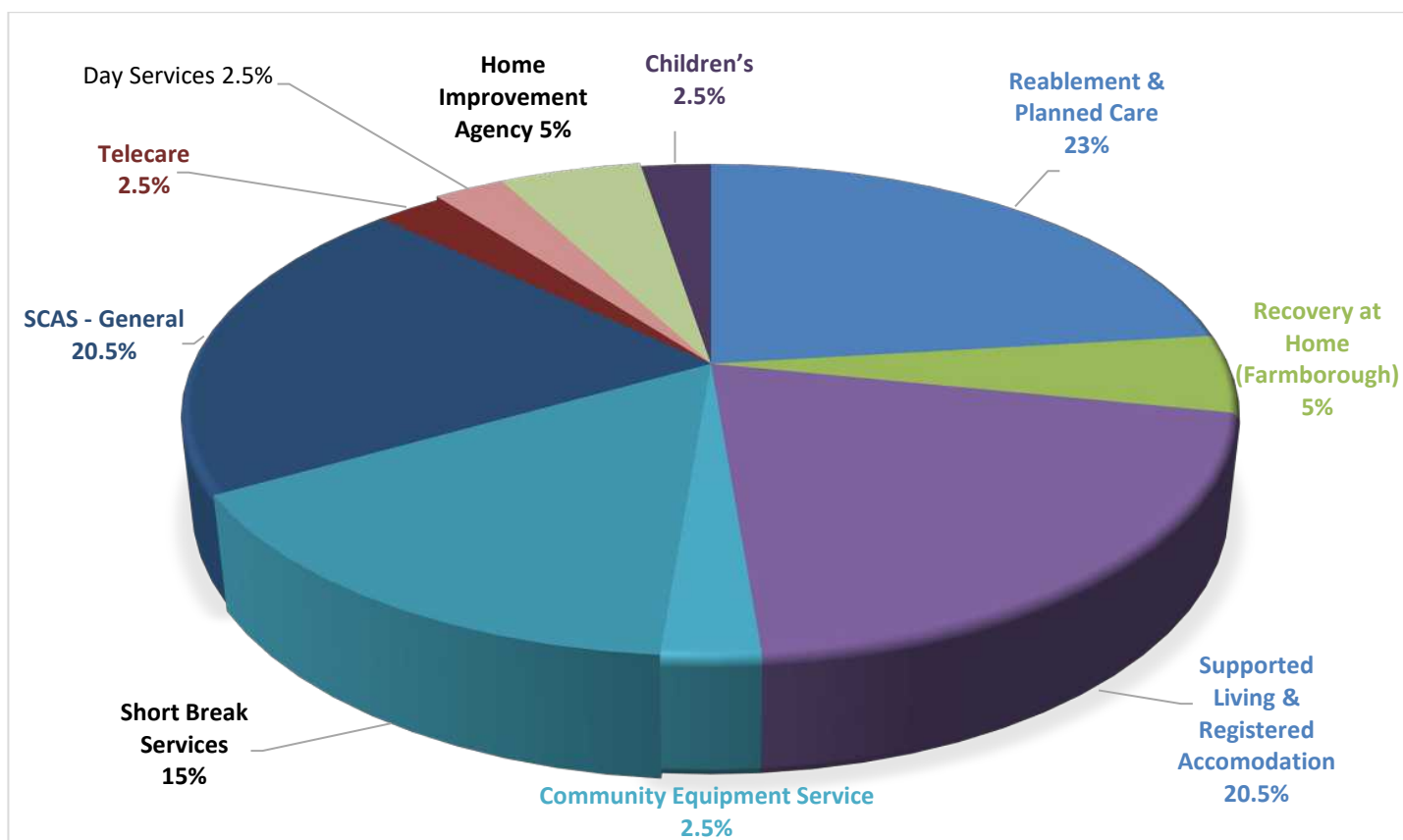
- 3.1 Sunderland Care and Support Limited takes pride in the high-quality services we provide our customers.
- 3.2 We pro-actively welcome both positive and negative feedback from all of our customers and view this as our opportunity to learn and to improve; and recognise that such feedback helps us to corroborate the standard of service our customers receive.

4 COMPLIMENTS

- 4.1 A total of **thirty-nine compliments** were received **1st July to 30th September 2021**, representing:
- around **30%** (seventeen) **less** than were recorded in the previous quarter (fifty-six)
 - around **38%** (twenty-four) **less** than were recorded over the same period, the previous year (sixty-three)
 - around **49%** (thirty-eight-point-five) **lower** than the median average of seventy-seven-point-five per quarter noted for the year April 2020-March 2021
 - and nearly **62%** (sixty-three) **lower** than the median average of one-hundred-and-two per quarter noted for the previous year, April 2019-March 2020.

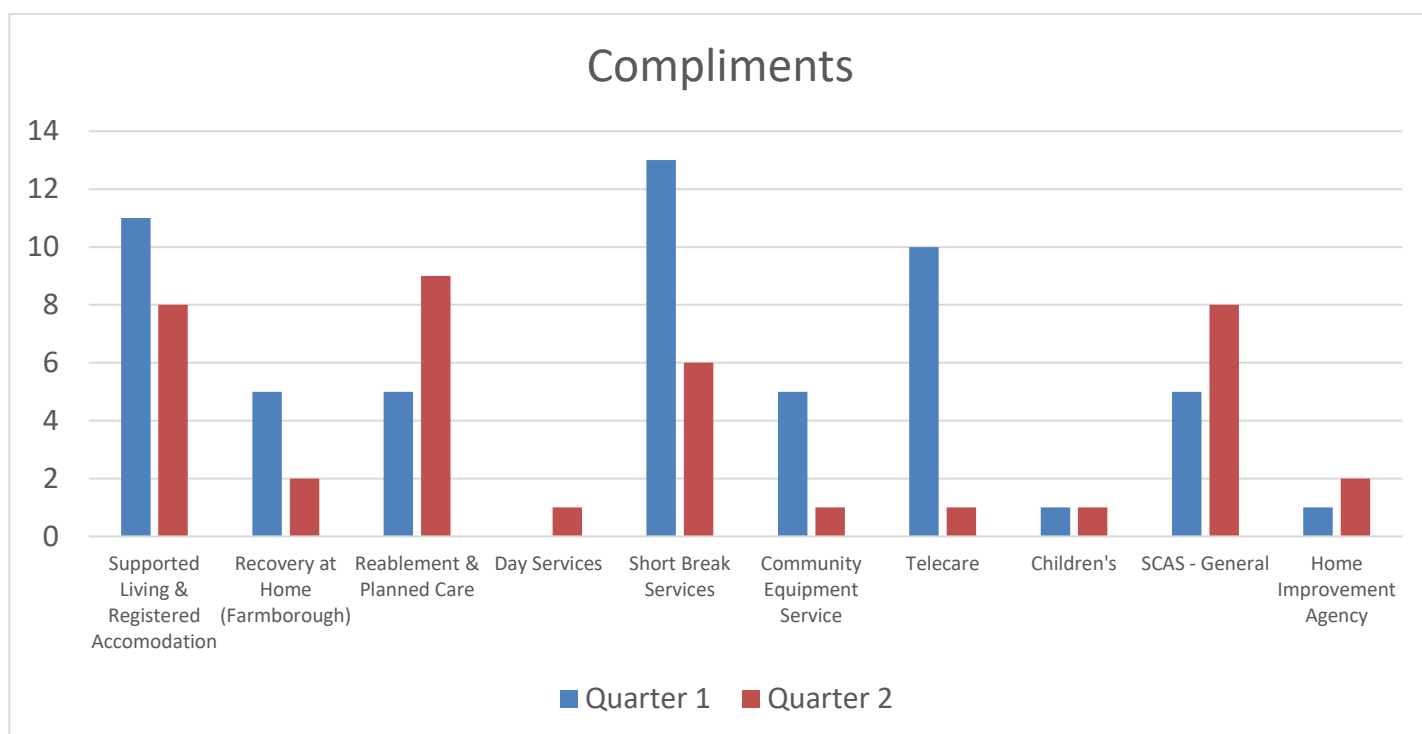
4.2 Quarter 2 Compliments Breakdown - Distribution

Compliments received during the quarter were distributed across the following service areas:



- Reablement & Planned Care: 9 (23%) – **four more** than the previous quarter
- Supported Living & Registered Accommodation: 8 (20.5%) – **three less** than the previous quarter
- SCAS - General: 8 (20.5%) – **three more** than the previous quarter
- Short Break Services: 6 (15%) – **seven less** than the previous quarter
- Home Improvement Agency: 2 (5%) – **one more** than the previous quarter
- Recovery at Home (Farmborough): 2 (5%) – **three less** than the previous quarter
- Community Equipment Service: 1 (2.5%) – **four less** than the previous quarter
- Children's: 1 (2.5%) – no change
- Day Services: 1 (2.5%) – **one more** than the previous quarter
- Telecare: 1 (2.5%) – **nine less** than the previous quarter

4.3 Quarter 2 Compliments Breakdown - Previous Quarter Comparison



It is of note that during the quarter, 40% of Service Areas received more compliments or achieved the same number of compliments as received during the previous quarter, with remaining areas seeing reductions in the number of compliments received.

4.4 Quarter 2 Compliments Breakdown - Synopsis

Praise during the quarter was extensive, highlights of which included:

- **Supported Living** – recognition for the 'kindness and professionalism' of staff and appreciation of the 'care and consideration' provided for customers
- **Recovery at Home / Farmborough Court** – recognition of the help and support provided by the Service for customers following their discharge from hospital
- **Reablement** – recognition for the 'high level of care' and 'fantastic help and support' provided to enable customers to remain in their own home
- **Short Break Services** – appreciation for the 'smashing' support provided to customers by team members
- **CES** – recognition for the 'very expeditious service' provided
- **Telecare** – appreciation of the help and support provided by staff in response to a customer falling at home
- **Children's** – recognition for the 'excellent relationship' team members have with professionals, children and family members.
- **Day Services** – recognition for activities provided for customers
- **SCAS** – recognition for the support provided by members of the SCAS Handy Persons Team to facilitate a customer's move into their new home

4.5 Customer Satisfaction Consultations

There were no responses from customers and their families via proactive customer satisfaction consultations noted during the reporting period.

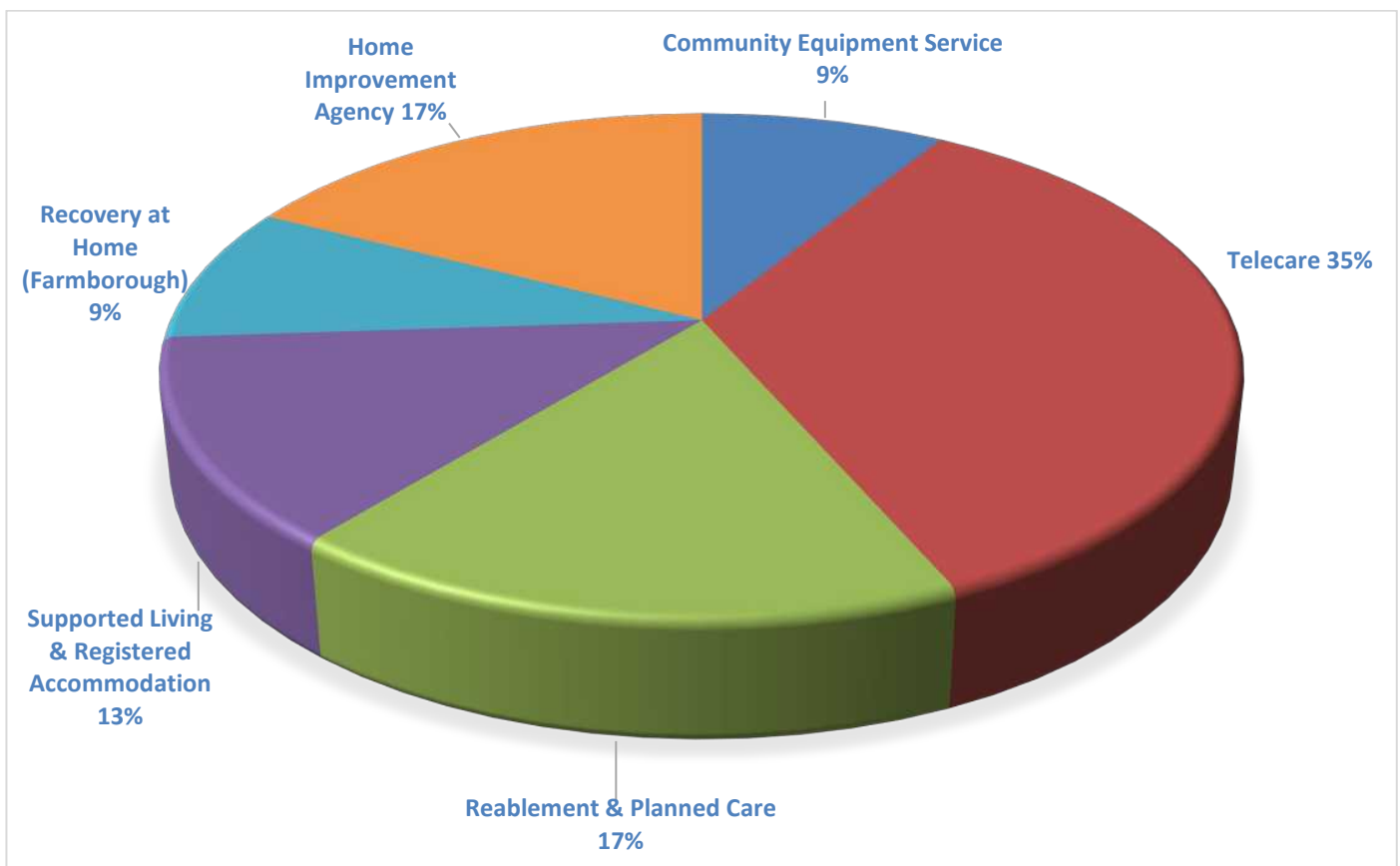
5 COMPLAINTS

5.1 A total of **twenty-three complaints** were received by the Company from **1st July to 30th September 2021**, representing:

- around **53.3%** (eight) **more** than were recorded in the previous quarter (fifteen)
- **77%** (ten) **more** than were recorded over the same period, the previous year (thirteen)
- around **58.6%** (eight-point-five) **greater** than the median average of fourteen-point-five per quarter noted over the year, April 20-March 21
- but around **41%** (sixteen) **lower** than the median average of thirty-nine per quarter noted for the previous year, April 2019-March 2020

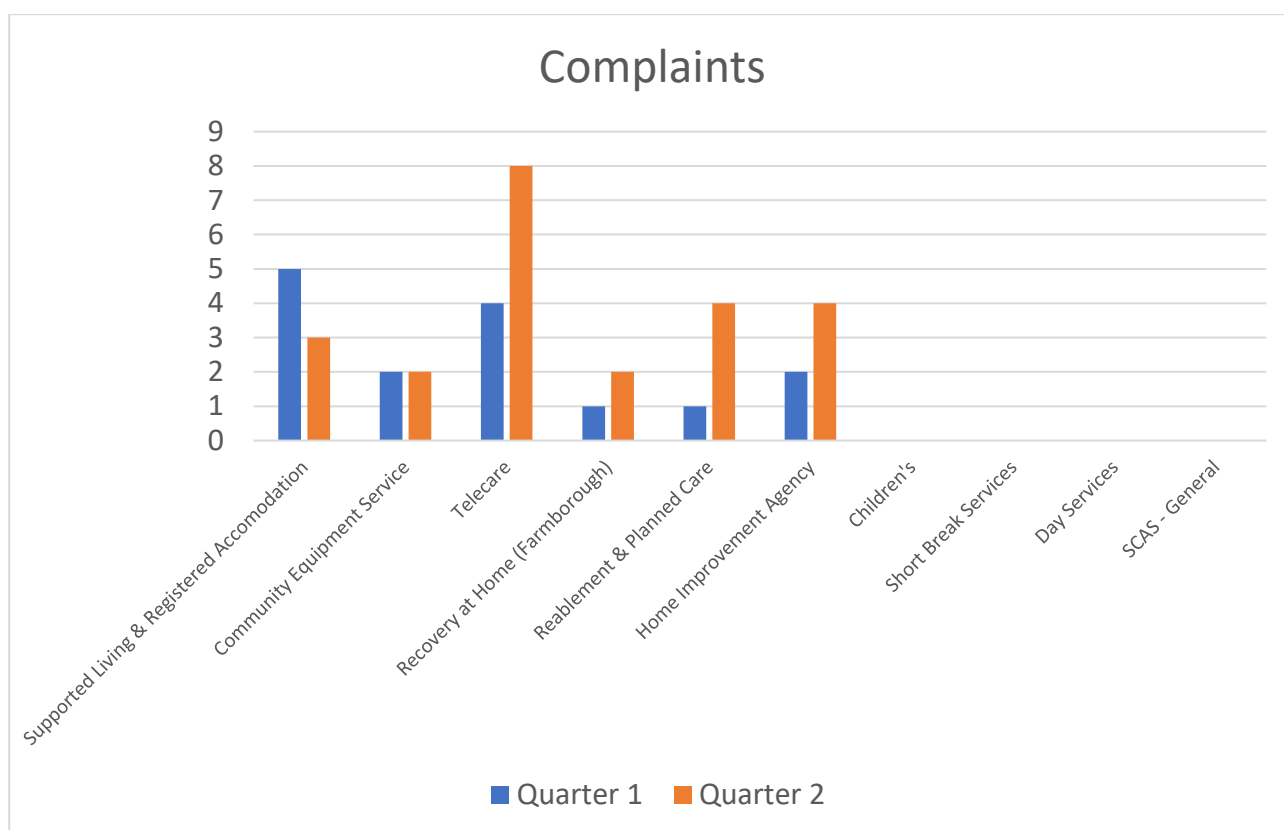
5.2 Quarter 2 Complaints Breakdown – Distribution

Complaints received during the quarter were distributed across the following service areas:



- **Reablement & Planned Care: 4 (17%) – three more than the previous quarter**
- **Home Improvement Agency: 4 (17%) – two more than the previous quarter**
- **Supported Living & Registered Accommodation: 3 (13%) – two less than the previous quarter**
- **Community Equipment Service: 2 (9%) – no change from the previous quarter**
- **Telecare: 8 (35%) – four more than the previous quarter**
- **Recovery at Home (Farmborough): 2 (9%) – one more than the previous quarter**
- **Day Services: Zero (0%) – no change from the previous quarter**
- **Short Break Services: Zero (0%) – no change from the previous quarter**
- **Children's: Zero (0%) - no change from the previous quarter**
- **SCAS - General: Zero (0%) - no change from the previous quarter**

5.3 Quarter 2 Complaints Breakdown - Previous Quarter Comparison



It is of significance that **60%** of Service Areas either received **zero complaints** or **less complaints** than were noted over the previous quarter, as follows:

- **Telecare, Farmborough, the Home Improvement Agency, Reablement & Planned Care Services** noted an **increase** in complaints
- **Supported Living & Registered Accommodation Services** noted a **reduction** in complaints
- **Children's, Short Breaks & Day Services** saw **zero** complaints during the period
- and **no complaints** were noted for **SCAS** generally.

5.4 Quarter 2 Complaints Breakdown - Synopsis

Complaints for the quarter were categorised as follows:

- x9 (39.1%) related to Customer Service / Service Delivery Standards
- x7 (30.4%) related to Service Provision / Customer Expectations
- x3 (13%) related to the performance of External Contractors
- x2 (8.7%) related to Telecare Equipment
- x1 (4.3%) related to Company Communications
- x1 (4.3%) were miscellaneous concerns

5.5 Quarter 2 Complaints Breakdown - Resolution

In all instances where a complaint had been raised during the reporting period, the complaint was acknowledged either verbally or in writing, an appropriate colleague tasked to undertake a comprehensive fact-finding exercise and a response provided to the complainant when resolved.

And where a complaint was upheld in full or in-part, the response provided included an overview of any remedial actions to be implemented.

Of all complaints received during the period, **over half** (52.2%) of **complaints** received during the reporting period were **not upheld**, with around **17.4%** being **upheld in-full**, **26.1% upheld in-part** and the remaining **4.3% in the process of being resolved**.

There were seven complaints (around 30% of all complaints) requiring (Step 2) Formal resolution, no complaints requiring (Step 3) External resolution and no non-SCAS complaints noted during the period.

5.6 Previous Quarters - Complaints Breakdown - Resolution

There were no complaints noted as remaining open to SCAS 'Tell Us What You Think' Procedures from previous quarters.

6 CORPORATE ASSURANCE

- 6.1 Our Company is committed to be a learning organisation, where improvement is led through open feedback and recognising how we can do things better.
- 6.2 Despite the continuing impact of the Global Covid-19 Pandemic and within extremely challenging circumstances, we have continued to operate within the full scope of our Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy to provide assurance that this is achieved.
- 6.3 Utilising our monthly Complaint Forums, chaired by our Deputy Chief Operating Officer and attended by Senior colleagues, all complaints are considered in detail, to identify any common themes and improvement opportunities, and reflect upon and share lessons learnt across the company.
- 6.4 Some recent examples of themes considered at Forum have included:

- the importance our **public facing information** has in providing customers, their family and other professionals with a clear understanding of our service offer at the point of referral & admission and how the company can improve its communications
- the importance **situational awareness & emotional intelligence** has within Social Care and how our mandatory Values Training can support colleagues to better understand how their actions can be perceived by others

**Together for Children
Customer Feedback Six Month Summary Report
April 2021- September 2021**



HIGHLIGHT SUMMARY

What are our key achievements?

- We have refreshed our complaint processes with the aim to improve customer experience and resolve concerns more quickly.
- We have received 121 compliments so far this year from children, young people, families, and professionals.
- We have successfully helped 107 customers to receive satisfactory resolutions to their queries, issues or concerns informally, without having to initiate a complaint.
- Overall, the number of complaints received so far this year has reduced by 42% with many of our services seeing a decrease in the number of complaints.
- The timeliness of stage two complaints is improving, and fewer complaints are escalating.

What are our areas of focus?

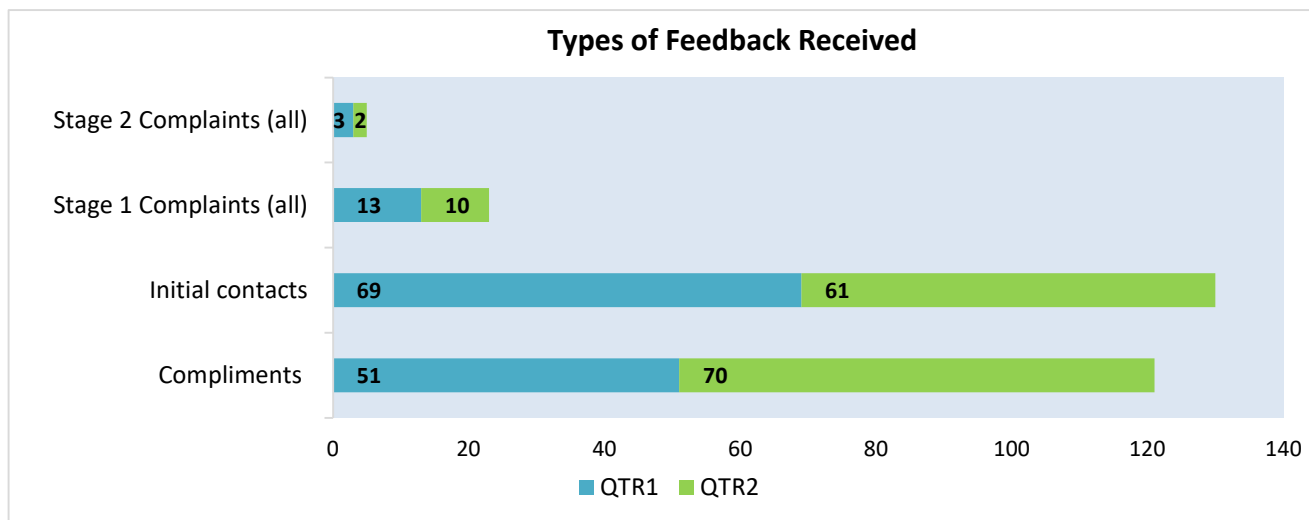
- Continued focus on improving the timeliness of stage 1 responses.
- Continuing to improve stage 2 investigation and adjudication timescales.
- Reviewing how we record complaints so that emerging themes can be analysed easier and, in more detail, where needed.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1. This report covers the period 1st April to 30th September 2021. Together for Children (TfC) welcomes all forms of feedback as a way of improving service delivery to children, young people and families. The report provides an overview of customer feedback received in the last six months, identifying topics and trends in relation to complaints information and areas of organisational learning that have taken place in response to feedback received.

2. SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

- 2.1. The Customer Feedback Team are responsible for receiving, recording, and responding to feedback received from children, young people and families regarding services delivered by Together for Children. The following graph shows the different types of feedback received in quarters one and two.



3. COMPLIMENTS

- 3.1. We have received 121 compliments in the last six months from children and young people, parents and other family members, foster carers, external professionals, and staff within TfC. Compliments are communicated to workers and management structures of the relevant teams and they are used to congratulate workers and teams and to inform service developments and best practice. Compliments are also shared more widely with the Senior Management Team and the TfC Communications Manager, so all staff can be recognised for their dedication and hard work. Below are some examples of the compliments we have received in the last six months:

Business Support, Social Care

"I know I have mentioned this previously but just wanted to again highlight what a credit XXX is to Business Support. The quality of her minute taking and all work she completes in general, her attention to detail and her willingness to go over and above always stands out as exemplary to me".

Cared for Children Service

"I just wanted to share with you that I just had a catch up with XXX and she is absolutely loving it within Permanence. She said that XXX and the team have made her feel so welcome and she is excited every day to come to work and feels confident knowing that there are so many people who are there to help her if she needs it. I have never seen her so happy!"

Child Protection Service

"I just wanted to take the time to express how impressed I have been with the work of XXX on the XXX case. This wasn't an easy case to be assigned to with many complicating factors which have spanned across almost a decade. However, XXX came in and has been tenacious in unpicking the chronology and getting to the crux of the situation for the children and family. She took the time to speak to all professionals and has got to the know

the children extremely well. For children who have been through so much, she listened to them and recognised when they needed further support; highlighting the professionals to provide it and checking in to make sure that the support had made a difference. She has kept everyone informed of situations that have arisen and has also given us the heads-up when she believed the children would have a difficult day. Her chairing of meetings has always been firm and fair - giving everyone the opportunity to share their views and her paperwork has been detailed and accurate. She works with compassion, confidentiality and integrity. I absolutely cannot fault her case management or the support she has given us as a school. XXX is one of the stars in your service and I felt that I needed to take the time to make you aware of all that she has done to make the difference to the lives of the children she is there to protect. I take my hat off to her for the way she has managed this case and given the children the opportunity to thrive”.

Fostering Service

“XXX is always contactable by phone, mobile, email or What’s App in case we have any queries or issues. XXX is great at setting the next supervision date before she leaves each month and arrives on time, every time. I always feel listened to in my supervisions (even if it’s just a case of containment) and XXX will work with me to find acceptable solutions to any issues which have arisen. She keeps me grounded when I might otherwise be going off on a tangent, not an easy thing! I am always prepared with a list of any things I want to discuss or anything I need to update XXX about. She is happy to answer my questions and is very knowledgeable in all social work issues and will seek answers elsewhere if she is unsure”.

Children’s Independent Reviewing Team

“I just wanted to get in touch following a review conference I was involved in yesterday. We always hear at the start of meetings how we can complain or compliment and I wanted to take the time to compliment XXX on her professionalism and conduct yesterday. I always feel as though we are in safe hands when XXX is chairing our meetings. She conducts her meetings in a lovely calm and controlled manner and leaves no stone unturned. Our core groups leading up to yesterday’s conference have at times been challenging however, the review conference was managed so well by XXX that it went without issue and I feel that we came away with a robust plan in place to move forward”.

Assessment Team

“I would like to give you some feedback regarding working with your social worker XXX. I feel that her professional, responsive, reactive, and supportive approach to working with the XX family should be shared. This is a very diverse and challenging family, and it has not been easy to keep a level head and balance throughout, however I feel that XXX has achieved this, a calm approach but not afraid to challenge when necessary. It is easy to complain and criticise and people always find time for that, however, praise and recognition should be highlighted too, and I feel XXX deserves this, a kind considerate and caring professional, and a pleasure to work with”.

Early Help

“Thank you for everything you have done for myself and XXX, most of all thank you so much for always having his back and believing he’s a good kid underneath it all! Thank you for fighting for him and believing in him when others didn’t. You have been the only one I can count on for support so thank you again”.

Children’s Homes

“I want to take the opportunity to tell you that XXX is the very best communicator in a children’s home I have come across since returning as an IRO in December 2016. He is exceptional at letting other professionals know what is happening to XXX which is invaluable to an IRO. I would like this compliment to be placed on his supervision file”.

Anti-Social Behaviour Service

“Loved all the activities, group work and sweets”. “We are more aware of what behaviours are anti-social and raised awareness. Gave strategies for support”. “Wear Kids staff were lovely and felt confident to ask questions and played an active part”.

Connexions Service

"I went to see XXX yesterday and I just wanted to pass on again some really positive comments she has given me. XXX told me that college hadn't got her email and you have been in contact with her and have sorted all of this out for her and XXX couldn't have been more thankful highlighting she wouldn't have been going to college if it hadn't been for your help. XXX hasn't always felt supported by school staff so I just wanted to say thank you because at this time in XXX life and the pressure she feels from school it would have been easy for her to have lost interest and motivation in accessing additional education despite her clear capabilities".

Children with Disabilities Service

"To everyone at the office who has helped me over the years. You have all helped me make my childhood a lot better by being there and supporting me through the difficult times, so thank you"

Customer Feedback Service

"Right from the beginning XXX took a significant amount of time to get to know me and understand my complaint, she was extremely patient when I went back to her with amends regarding the complaint outline, she kept me updated throughout and was extremely compassionate but also totally professional. She actually helped me restore my faith in TFC as an organisation and I feel she is a complete asset to your organisation. I just wanted to pass on my feedback as I know it's important for appraisals and reviews to understand how clients find the service received from your department's representatives."

4. INITIAL CONTACTS

- 4.1. Following the refresh of the complaints process in 2020/21, we replaced 'pre-complaints' with 'initial contacts', expanding our definition so that we could log and account for every customer contact received via the Customer Feedback Team. Initial contacts presented by customers can be queries, concerns, information requests or issues that require a resolution. Whilst customers are provided with information about the complaints process and their rights to complain, we aim to achieve informal resolution at the earliest opportunity so that the customer receives a quick resolution and has a better experience. The table below shows the initial contacts data for quarters one and two:

Initial Contacts	Q1 (Apr – Jun)	Q2 (Jul – Sep)	Total
Number Received	69	61	130
Percentage resolved as Initial Contact	81%	85%	82%
Percentage progressed to Stage 1	19%	15%	18%

- 4.2. We have received 130 initial contacts in the last six months. Through responding to contacts at the outset, we have helped 107 of our customers to receive satisfactory responses and resolutions informally with only 23 contacts (18%) progressing to a formal stage one complaint.

5. COMPLAINTS PROCESS

- 5.1. The Complaints Process for Statutory Children's Services follows the statutory guidance. This is a 3-stage process as follows:
- **Stage One** – the initial stage of the process is investigated by an Officer in the Customer Feedback Team. It is hoped a local resolution can be achieved within 10 working days, however an extension of up to 20 working days can be requested for more complex cases.
 - **Stage Two** – on receipt of the response to their stage one complaint, customers have 20 working days to request their complaint is progressed to stage two if they are unhappy with the initial outcome. At this

stage, an Investigating Officer and an Independent Person will be appointed to investigate the complaint and it can take up to 65 working days to complete.

- **Stage Three** – if the customer remains unhappy with the outcome of the stage two complaint, they have 20 working days to request their complaint is progressed to stage three. The review should take place within 30 days of the request. At stage three, a review panel will be appointed to review the complaint. This will consist of three independent people who will make recommendations to the Director of Children’s Services.

5.2. If the customer remains unhappy, they can raise their complaint with the Local Government Ombudsman.

5.3. Any complaints that do not relate to Statutory Children’s Services, are handled under the Corporate Complaints Procedure which consists of two formal stages. Corporate complaint figures are included in this report.

6. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

6.1. The table below shows the number of complaints we received across each stage of the complaints process:

Children’s Social Care Complaints:	Q1	Q2	Total	
Stage One	11	7	18	↓
Stage Two	3	1	4	↓
Stage Three	1	0	1	↓
Total	15	8	23	↓

Corporate Complaints	Q1	Q2	Total	
Stage One	2	3	5	↓
Stage Two	0	1	1	↓
Total	2	4	6	↓

Overall Totals	17	12	29	↓
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6.2. **Overall Total (all stages)** - In the first six months of the year we received 29 complaints compared with 50 in the first six months of 2020/21 which is an overall decrease of 42%. Broken down further this shows Children’s Social Care complaints have reduced by 41% and Corporate complaints by 60%.

6.3. **Stage One Complaints** – we have received 18 children’s social care stage one complaints compared with 28 for the same period in 2020/21. We also saw a decrease in the number of corporate stage one complaints, receiving 5 compared with 11 in the same period last year.

6.4. **Stage two Complaints** – we have received 4 children’s social care stage two complaints of which 1 has progressed to a stage 3. Only 1 of the corporate complaints progressed to stage two, compared to 4 last year.

6.5. The number of stage two complaints has reduced from Q1 to Q2 this year suggesting that as we continue to implement the new complaint processes, customers are having their concerns addressed earlier, at stage one.

Number of Complaints by Young People:

6.6. There were 0 complaints received by young people in the first six months of the year which is a decrease of 3 when compared to the same period last year.

7. STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

7.1. The table below shows the number of stage one complaints received by service area.

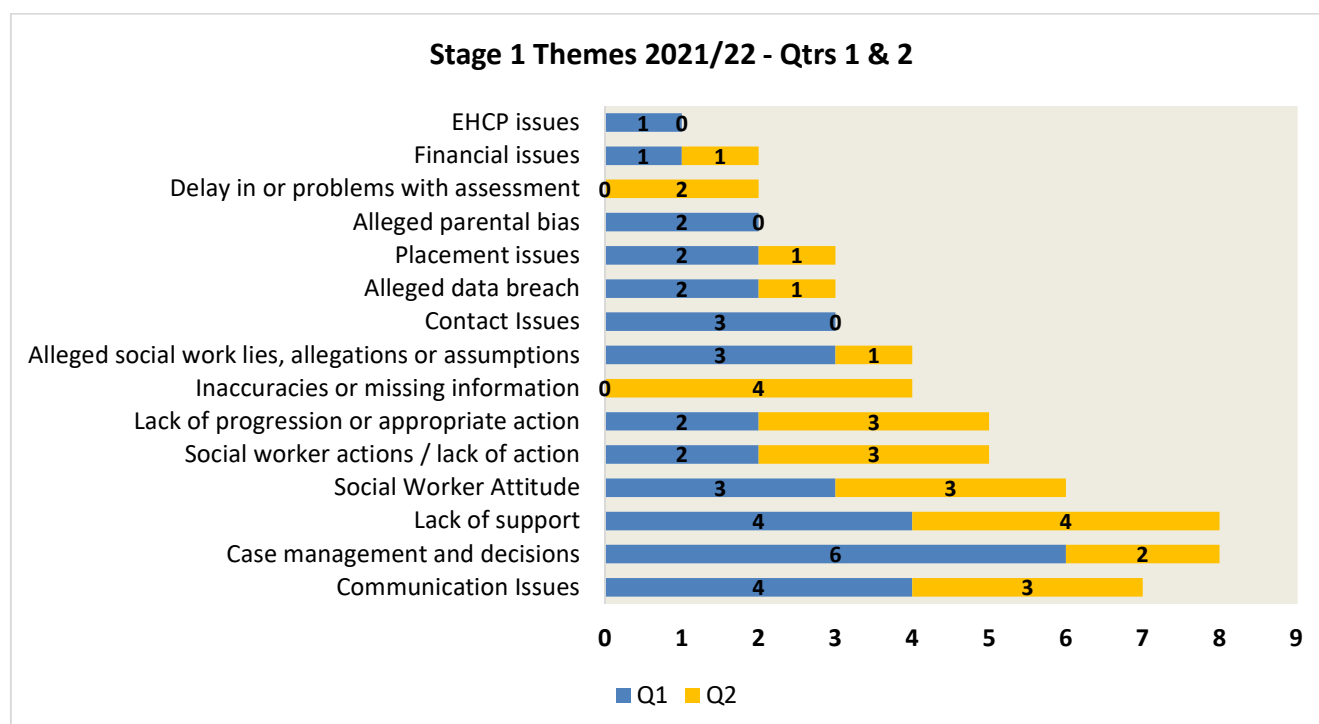
TEAM	% of Stage 1 Complaints Received
Adoption Service	2%
Assessment Service	33%
Child Protection Service	24%
Early Help Service	4%
Education	4%
ICRT Service	4%
Cared for and Permanence Service	4%
SEND Service	9%
Children with Disabilities Service	13%
Fostering Service	2%
TOTAL	100%

7.2. 33% of complaints received in the first six months relate to the assessment service however there has been a 20% decrease in the number for complaints relating to this service when compared with the previous year. 24% of stage one complaints received in the first six months relate to the child protection services but again there has been a 50% decrease in the number of complaints relating to this service when compared with the same period in the previous year.

7.3. Overall, the number of stage one complaints have decreased across most services other than the Children with Disabilities service who saw a slight increase of 3 when compared with the previous year.

Themes:

7.4. The main themes of the complaints received at Stage one in 2020-21 are shown in the table below:



7.5. Complaints relating to lack of support have almost doubled when compared with the same period in 2020/21 and is now one of the top three themes together with case management decisions and communication. This

shows a difference when compared to the top three themes in the previous year (social worker action /lack of action, contact issues/Family Time and inaccuracies or missing information).

- 7.6. Complaints regarding social worker actions/lack of action has significantly reduced when compared to last year and has moved from being the top theme in 2020/21 to the fifth in the first six months of this year. Although complaints regarding communication and case management decisions are now in the top three themes, the numbers of complaints have not increased when compared to the same period last year.
- 7.7. The reduction in the number of complaints overall together with a shift in the top three themes demonstrates the positive impact of learning from complaints and proactivity addressing emerging themes. The refresh of the complaints process has strengthened the initial contact stage which is contributing to an overall reduction in complaint numbers.

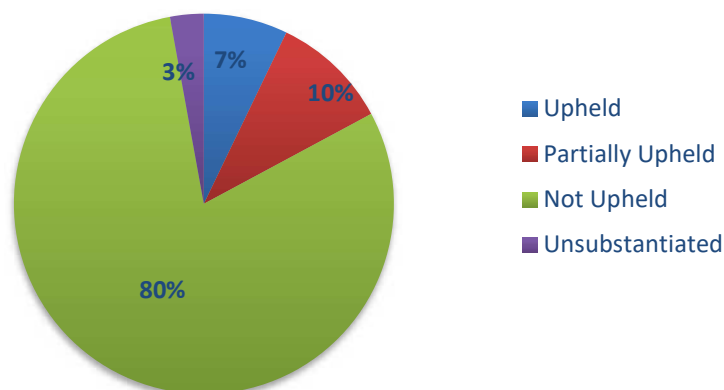
Timeliness of Response to Stage One Complaints:

- 7.8. In the first six months of 2021/22 the timeliness of all stage one complaints has fluctuated as we have moved to the refreshed complaints process. The main changes to the process have included managing all stage one complaints within the Customer Feedback Team with a greater focus on customer conciliation, mediation, and speedier resolution e.g., offering opportunities for customers to meet with workers and managers so they can listen, discuss, and resolve their issues rather than moving to the lengthier stage two process (where this is possible). Whilst this change in process has increased customer satisfaction by resolving issues at this stage, it has consequently taken some stage one complaints (in Q2) out of timescale which has impacted the year-to-date figure. Moving forward we will be focussing on how to achieve the same result but within the 10 or 20 working day timescales.

% of all stage 1 complaints responded to in timescale	Q1	Q2	YTD
	73%	33%	52%

Stage One Complaint Outcomes:

- 7.9. There were 70 elements of complaint identified within stage one complaints that have concluded in the first six months of 2021-22. The outcomes of those stage one complaint elements are shown below.



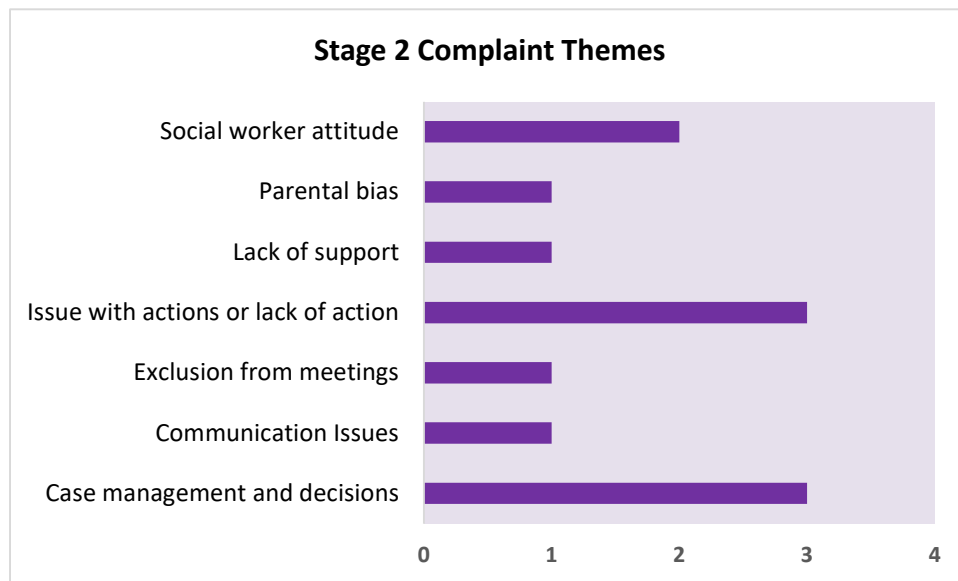
- 7.10. Most complaint elements (equating to 80%) were not upheld and a further 3% were unsubstantiated or not investigated. This is significantly higher than the same period last year where 49% of elements were not upheld.
- 7.11. 10% of elements were partially upheld and 7% were upheld. The five upheld complaint elements related to poor communication, a missed visit, inaccurate information and impact of TfC involvement.

8. STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS AND STAGE THREE REVIEWS

- 8.1. In total 5 stage two complaints have been received in Q1 and Q2. 4 of the stage two complaints relate to the Children with Disabilities Team, Assessment Team and Child Protection Team. The 1 corporate complaint relates to the SEND team. Overall, we have received 37.5% fewer stage two complaints when compared with the same period in the previous year.

Themes:

- 8.2. The number of themes relating to stage two complaints have reduced this year in line with a decrease in the number of complaints and a decrease in the number of elements within each complaint. The main themes for 2021-22 are shown in the table below (*note one complaint can have multiple themes*):



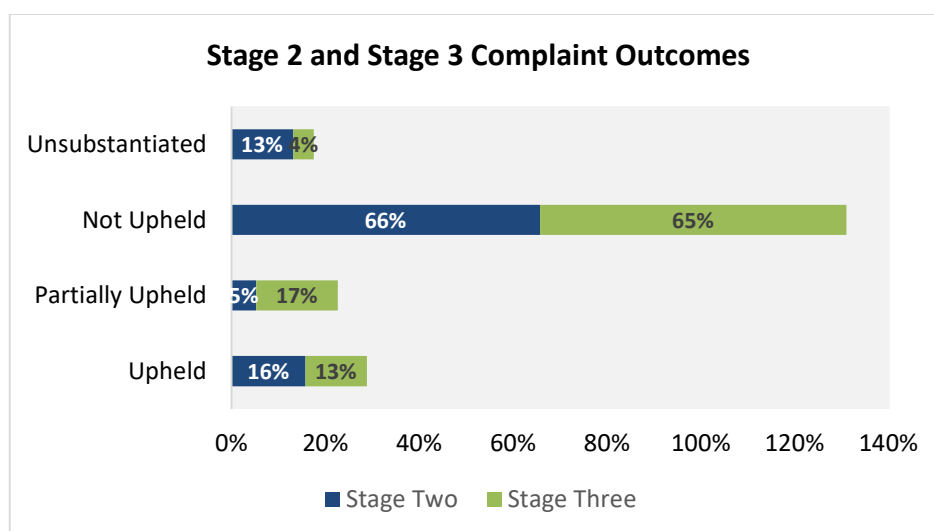
- 8.3. Most stage two themes relate to case management and decisions, issues with action/lack of action and social worker attitude. The increase of themes relating to case management and decisions aligns with the increase at stage one.
- 8.4. When compared to 2020/21, lack of action remains a top theme however themes around communication issues have reduced and assessment reports is no longer identified as a theme, suggesting learning and improvement actions are having a positive impact for our customers.

Timeliness of Response to Stage Two Complaints:

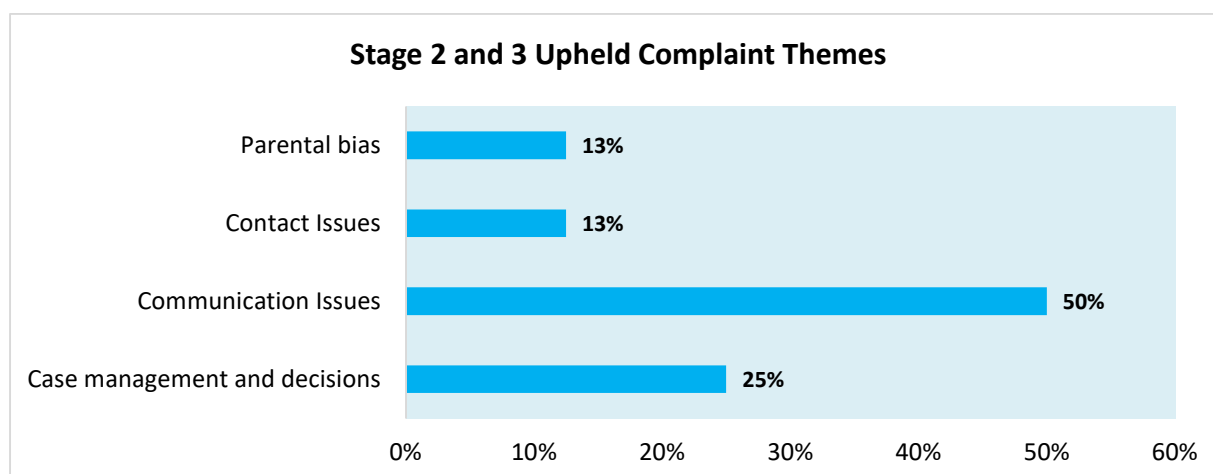
- 8.5. In the first six months of 2021-22, 8 stage two complaints were concluded (*figures differ to numbers received, as there were complaints open at the start of the year from 2020/21 and complaints that remain open moving into 2021-22*). Four of the stage two complaints were completed within the 65-day timescale (50%). This is a significant improvement compared with the same period in 2020/21 where only 8% of stage 2 complaints were completed in timescale. The average number of working days taken to complete stage 2 complaints in the first six months of this year is 71.6 days compared with 129 for the same period last year.
- 8.6. This improvement is due to the changes that were made to the complaints process. The changes streamlined the process to improve the customer journey and realigned timescales and resources for the adjudication task. Although these changes are having a positive impact on the timeliness, further improvement is required which remains an area of focus for the Customer Feedback service.

Stage Two and Three Complaint Outcomes

- 8.7. There were 38 elements of complaint identified within all stage two complaints that concluded in the first six months of 2021/22 and 23 elements concluded at stage three (Children's Social Care). This is a significant reduction when compared to 202 stage 2 elements in the same period last year together with 35 elements at stage 3. The outcomes of those stage two and three complaint elements are shown below.



- 8.8. At stage two, the majority of complaint elements equating to 66% were not upheld and a further 13% were unsubstantiated or withdrawn. 5% of elements were partially upheld and 16% were upheld.
- 8.9. At stage three 13% were upheld, with a further 17% partially upheld. 65% were not upheld and 4% were unsubstantiated or withdrawn.
- 8.10. Since April 2021, of the 23 elements that went to Stage Three Panel, no outcome was changed by Panel. The main subject areas of elements upheld at stage two and three are as follows:



- 8.11. Comparing upheld elements with the same period in the previous year, communication is a recurring upheld theme at stages two and three. However due to the individualised nature of complaints it is difficult to say if the reasons for this is due to a limited impact of recommendations or if it is due to other reasons. Parental bias and case management and decisions are emerging themes when compared with the previous year. To assist with the analysis of themes, the upheld elements identified in both stage two investigations and stage three panels are reviewed regularly by the Children's Social Care Senior Management Team. The Customer Feedback Team identifies any reoccurring complaint elements and feeds this back to the relevant services.

9. OMBUDSMAN REFERRALS

- 9.1. There have been 4 complaints highlighted to the Customer Feedback Team by the Local Government Ombudsman so far this year; 1 was escalated to Stage 2, 1 was closed with no further action, and 2 remain in progress (at investigation stage).
- 9.2. At the start of this year there were 4 LGO still being investigated that have now been concluded. 3 of the investigations were upheld and 1 was not upheld.

10. COST OF COMPLAINTS

- 10.1. The total cost of investigating claims in the first two quarters of 2021/22 is £12,039 compared with £41,182 for the same period in 2020/21. This reduction is due to all new complaints (since the introduction of the refreshed complaints process) being managed internally by the Customer Feedback Team with no external allocations.
- 10.2. So far this year the compensation costs paid in relation to upheld complaints has totalled £27,315.52. This is significantly higher than previous years due to one complaint dating back to 2017 whereby a large payment was made to remedy lost care provision of 3.5 years dating back to 2017.

11. ABUSIVE, UNREASONABLE PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS

- 11.1. There have been no recorded Abusive, Unreasonable Persistent or Vexatious Complainants in the first six months of 2021/22.

12. LEARNING & IMPROVEMENT

- 12.1. Together for Children are committed to getting it right for the families in Sunderland. To do this we continue to drive improvement from learning from the complaints and compliments raised. An action plan is maintained by the Customer Feedback Team which includes actions and recommendations from stage two investigations and stage three panels. The action plan is closely monitored by the team. Reminders are sent to managers with responsibility for the recommendations each month and reported into Senior Management Team meetings to ensure that the learning is shared across the whole service.
- 12.2. In the last six months we have been making progress to address the recommendations in the 2020/21 Annual Customer Feedback Report. We have already seen positive impacts from this work through continued reductions in complaint numbers, a significant reduction in the number of complaint elements and a reduction in the reoccurring themes from last year.
- 12.3. We have been working with services to implement the refreshed complaints processes with a view to improving timeliness and responding more proactively to customer concerns. Although there is still work to do to improve timeliness, particularly at stage one, it is evident that fewer complaints are escalating through the stages. This together with positive feedback received from customers is suggesting that concerns are being resolved at an earlier stage and therefore customers are not having to proceed through the lengthier stages unnecessarily. The Customer Feedback Team have already held a 3-month review of the refreshed process to check that the expected benefits are being realised and have the 6-month review planned for October 2021.
- 12.4. We will continue to work through the remaining recommendations set out in the Annual Report to identify further improvement activity and to explore more possibilities. From analysing the themes in the first six months of this year, it is apparent that some new themes are emerging. The Customer Feedback Service will proactively work with services to analyse these themes to identify learning and improvement opportunities. The Customer Feedback Service is also focused on developing skills with its team and has attended refresher training on the LGO Remedy Guidance and is looking to attend Complaints Handling and Investigations training to achieve a BTEC Level 5 qualification.