



Annual Complaints Report

2020 - 2021

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1. Introduction

All councils need to provide complaint procedures to respond to citizens' concerns in an open and transparent way within defined timescales and in accordance with legislation.

The purpose of this report is to outline the complaints and compliments that the Council received in the period 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021, highlighting key themes and longer-term trends.

- 1.1 The report also explains how the Council has performed against the required standards and how services have learnt from complaints received.
- 1.2 The report is being presented later than usual due to the impact of the global pandemic which impacted resources which were needing to be used to assist with the emergency response.
- 1.3 Sheffield City Council's Complaints Policy is currently under review as we wish to gain further insight from citizens to challenge us and the way we do things.
- 1.4 Sheffield City Council welcomes complaints as an opportunity to maintain high quality performance and a gateway to consistently review and improve the quality of service offered to citizens. A complaint as **'any expression of dissatisfaction whether justified or not'** - this definition is deliberately wide to ensure that complaints are recognised easily and can be addressed in an effective and timely way.
- 1.5 Sheffield City Council has a two-staged approach when dealing with complaints under the Corporate Complaints Procedure. (See Appendix 1 – Corporate Complaints Procedure). At all stages of the complaints process we advise complainants of who to contact if they are not satisfied with the outcome or the way in which their complaint was handled. There are separate specific statutory procedures for handling Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care complaints. The annual statutory reports in respect of these will be shortly made available.
- 1.6 The data in this report includes complaints considered at the Investigation and Review stages. Complaints resolved via problem solving are currently not consistently reported, however from 1st November 2021 this will be recorded and included in future reports.
- 1.7 Sheffield City Council has three main Portfolio areas delivering services to citizens. These are: Resources (including Policy Performance and Communication), People and Place. In addition, Sheffield City Council's strategic partners include Amey (Streets Ahead roads/pavements) and Veolia (Waste Management). See Section 4.
- 1.8 Sheffield City Council's Feedback & Complaints Team (based within Customer Services) is responsible for the development and implementation of policy and procedures on complaints. In addition, this team acts as the Council's liaison point with the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), Housing Ombudsman (HO) and Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO). The Annual Ombudsman complaints enquiries and investigations report is available here: [Complaints - Data Mill North](#)

2. Headlines

2.6% decrease in total number of complaints received from previous year
(Includes Amey and Veolia)

2019/20: 2068 Complaints



2020/21: 2014 Complaints

Sheffield City Council's 2 strategic partners received **the highest number of complaints** (Amey 55%, Veolia 23%) Totalling **78% of all complaints**. **All other Council Service Complaints total 22%** – see Table 3.1

The following information excludes Amey and Veolia data:

The top 3 Council Services receiving the highest number of complaints are:
Children's social care (28%), Adults social care (19%) and City Growth (12%)
see Table 4.1

50% of complaints were **responded to within 28 calendar days**
(Excludes adults and children's social care statutory complaints) – see Table 8.1

The **average escalation rate is 21%** in 2020/21, this is an improvement on the two previous years.
The average escalation rate for 2019/20 was 22% and 2018/19 was 24% - see Table 11.1

The most **frequent reason** for complaints was **quality of service*** and accounts for 33% of all complaint categorisations (260 of 781)
(See Appendix 1 for definitions) * - see Table 5.1

In addition to offering citizens an apology (138), **the top 3 remedies and service improvements were:**
Take action or enforce a decision (57); Provide or review employee training or guidance (48) and Change, Review or Provide a Service (27) – see Table 10.1

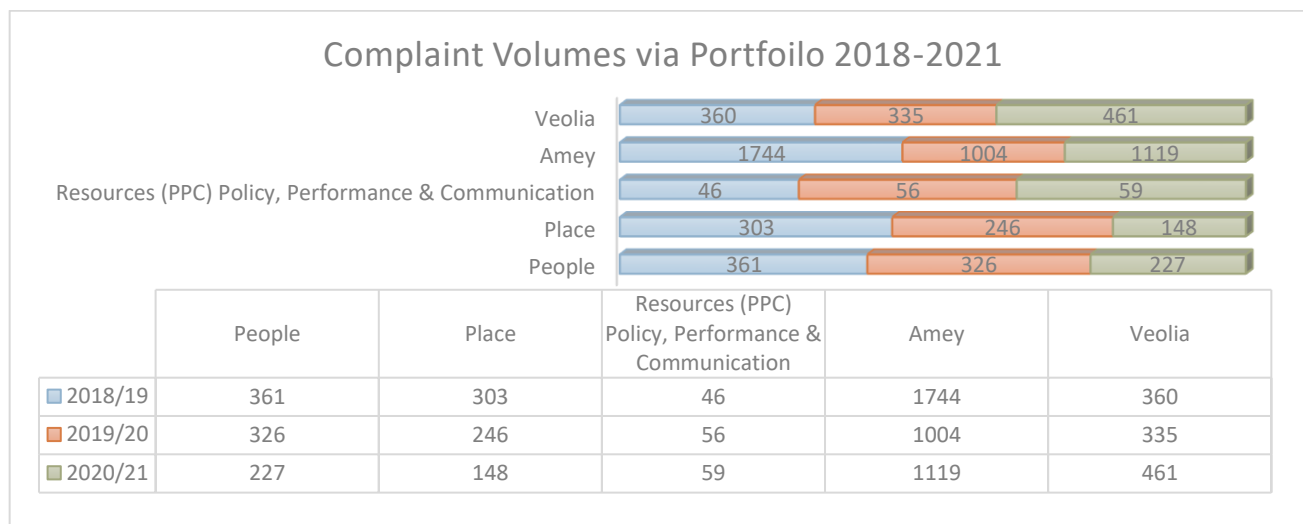
The number of **compliments** recorded decreased by **46%**
(169 compared to 379) recorded in previous year)

During 2020/21, the LGSCO upheld 17 complaints and the HO upheld 1 complaint
See Ombudsman report Appendix 2

The LGSCO has reported that 95 complaints/enquiries were received about the Council during 2020/21, compared with 143 in 2019/20 and 165 in 2018/19. The HO is yet to issue an annual report (delayed until January 2022) See Ombudsman report Appendix 2

3. Volumes of Complaints by Portfolio Area

3.1 The table below shows the comparison of complaint volumes for the years 2017-2020:



- There is an overall 2.6% decrease in the number of complaints received compared with the previous year. Three out of the five service areas have shown an increase in complaints.
- The overall decrease in complaints may be to some degree attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic. During the period March to July 2020 the country entered a 'lockdown period'. Sheffield City Council's Incident Management Group invoked emergency planning around working arrangements and provision of service. Many services were temporarily ceased or operated on reduced provision. The Feedback and Complaints Service was not deemed as a 'critical or priority service' during this period. As a result, the recording of complaints declined.

3.2 Place Portfolio Decrease:

The decrease in the number of complaints recorded for the Place Portfolio was predominantly due to Council Housing and Neighbourhood Services and the Repairs and Maintenance Teams delivering emergency work only.

The workforce during this period was reduced by approximately 50%, this was due to staff shielding, workforce absence or staff being temporarily re-deployed to support emergency Covid-19 functions.

Services were re-instated from the 15 July 2020 although further National Lockdowns and area restrictions imposed on Sheffield (Tier 3) did cause further disruption to service up until March 2021.

The above information is echoed across the other areas, especially People Portfolio. Due to the nature of the services provided by our Social Care Teams, work priorities were restructured to meet the needs of citizens.

3.3 Resources Portfolio:

It might have been expected under usual circumstances to see a higher increase in the volume of complaints for this area, as work completed on behalf of the Revenue and Benefits Team was transferred in house from our previous partner Capita. However, during the National Lockdown debt recovery was not pursued which led to a decrease in the volume of complaints recorded.

4.0 Volumes of New Complaints by Key Service Areas

4.1 The table below shows a more detailed breakdown of complaints received by the key service areas within each portfolio group.

Note -The complaint numbers recorded below are those considered at the 'Investigation Stage' of Sheffield City Councils complaints procedure. Dissatisfaction at the 'Problem Solving' stage is not captured within this report.

Portfolio	Service Area	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
People	Social Care – Adults	135	105	81
	Social Care – Children	190	165	121
	People – Other	36	56	25
	People Total	361	326	227
Place	Council Housing incl. Housing & Neighbourhood Services	102	119	45
	Council Housing Repairs	34	35	17
	Environmental Services	7	6	1
	Waste Management Client Team	101	39	15
	Culture & Environment	8	6	6
	City Growth	29	30	53
	Traffic & Parking	14	9	4
	Transport & Facilities Management	6	2	4
	Place – Other	2	0	3
	Place Total	303	246	148
Resources, including Policy Performance and Communication (PPC) (Revenues and Benefits previously recorded under Capita)	Customer Services	32	35	11
	Legal	2	1	3
	Finance & Commercial	8	9	0
	Benefits			42
	Revenues			3
	Other	4	11	0
	Resources & PPC Total	46	56	59
Total Complaints Excluding Strategic Partners				434
Amey	Streets Ahead	1744	1004	1119
Capita (Moved to Resources 2020)	Benefits	177	76	
	Revenues	51	25	
	Capita Total	228	101	
Veolia	Waste Management	360	335	461
Strategic Partner Complaint Total				1580
Overall Total		3042	2068	2014

Strategic Partner Complaints (Amey and Veolia) account for 78% (1580) of the total number of complaints. In 2019/20 this was 65% (1004+335 = 1339). Overall, this means a 13% increase for these Strategic Partners.

- **Veolia** (SCC Waste Management Service) total number of complaints increased in volume by 126. The increase in 2020/21 is largely due to the introduction of charges for providing new and replacement black bins.
- **Amey** (Streets Ahead) total number of complaints have increased in volume by 115.

Further investigation is required of high volumes of complaints linked to Strategic Partners

- **People Portfolio** accounts for 52% (227) of the total number of Council complaints (434) received in 2020/21. However, this is a decrease of 30% (99) on the previous year. The Covid-19 pandemic did impact all service areas and complaint recording. Due to the severity of pressure on our Social Care teams complaints recording was viewed as a lower priority. Also, service users did appear to be more understanding and appreciative of the frontline Social Care Services and what challenges they faced during this time.
- **Place Portfolio** accounts for 34% (148) of the total number of Council complaints (434). However, this is a 39% (98) decrease on the previous year.

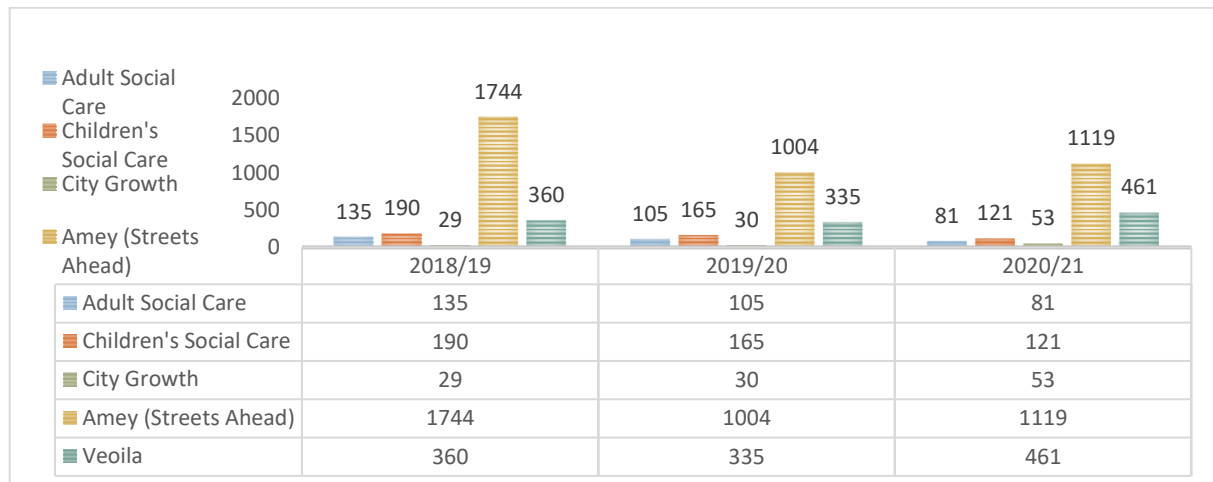
Council Housing, including Housing & Neighbourhood Services and the Repairs and Maintenance Teams, also operated reduced service provision during the Covid-19 lockdown. For example, the Repairs and Maintenance Service delivered Emergency and Urgent Repairs, work in Voids and Heating Mechanical & Electrical Services only with approximately 50% of staff. Surveys, routine repairs and non-urgent works were not carried out. On the 15 July 2020 the Council's Incident Management Group gave approval to reinstate the service and on 1 September 2020 the Contact Centre began taking appointments again for routine repairs and surveys.

During further lockdowns similar restrictions were in place with non-urgent and routine repairs being suspended. Although complaints continued to be received and processed, the numbers were reduced in line with the lower level of operational activity.

- **Resources Portfolio** (including PPC) accounts for 14% (59) of the total number of Council complaints (434). This remains similar to the previous year. This year, an increase in complaints was anticipated (due to the transfer of the work around Revenues and Benefits moving back to the council from Capita). However, during Covid-19, recovery of debt was suspended. This led to a decrease in the volume of complaints recorded for this service area.

(See 4.1 above).

4.2 The graph below shows the council service areas where highest volumes of complaints were recorded during 2020/21 and a comparison over the past 3 years 2018 - 2021:



Adult Social Care recorded the highest complaint category as 'Failure or Refusal'

Children's Social Care recorded the highest complaint category as 'Staff Conduct'

Place Portfolio (which includes City Growth) recorded the highest category of complaint as 'Quality'

Veoila recorded the highest complaint category as 'Failure or Refusal to provide a Service'

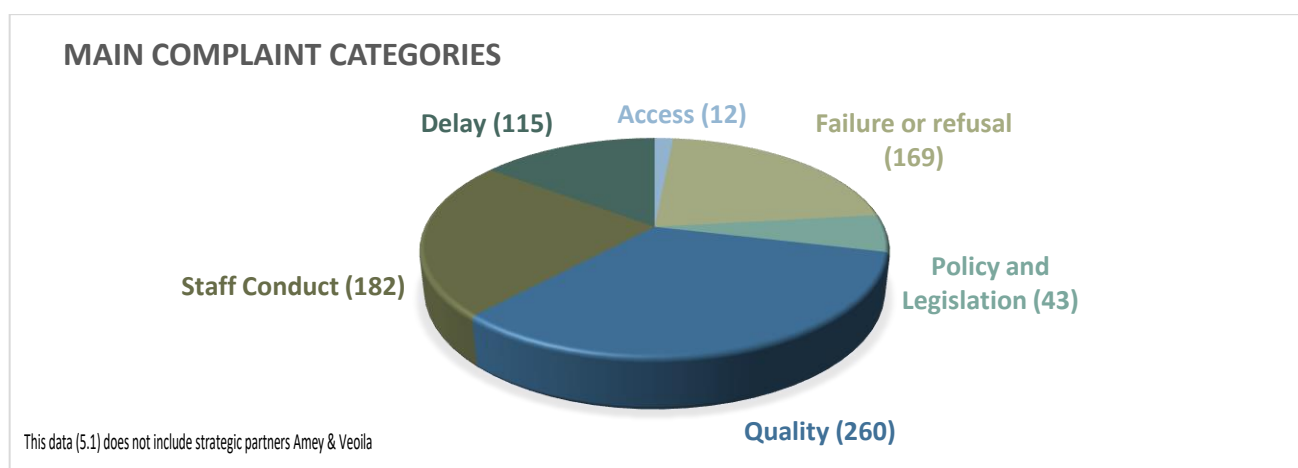
5.0 Complaint Categorisation

It is important that we understand what our citizens complain about, so Sheffield City Council use generic categorisations across all complaint areas to understand these themes.

*Note - a complaint may be recorded against more than one reason. *

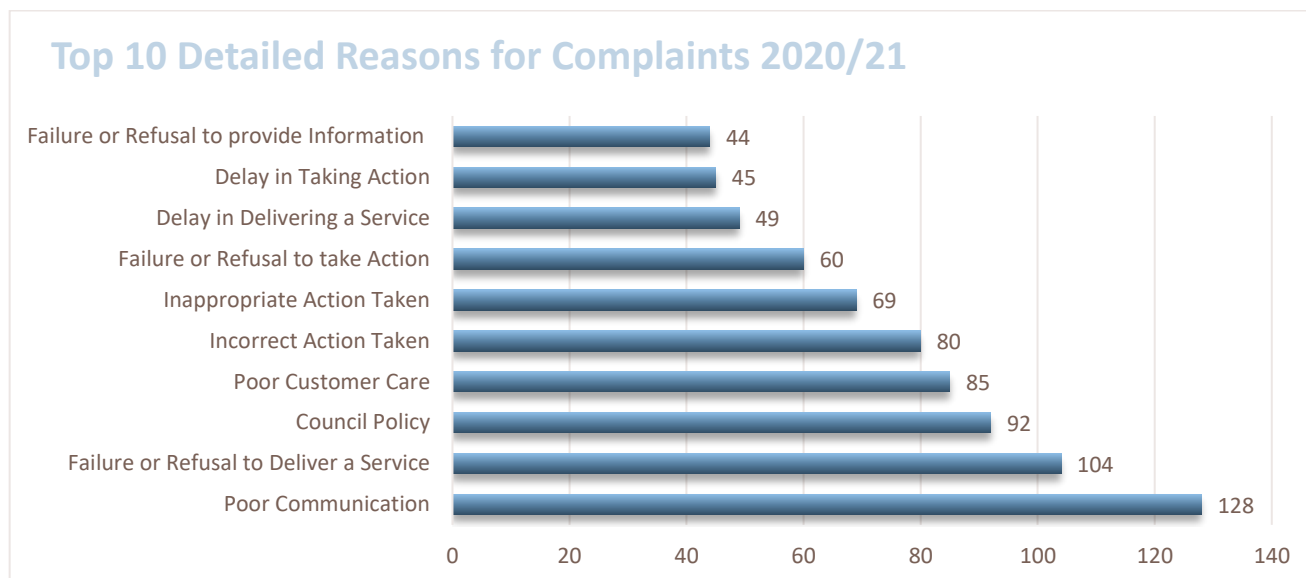
5.1 The chart below shows the 6 main reasons for complaints (see [Appendix 1](#) for definitions).

- 'Quality of Service' is the highest reason for complaints received in the reporting year 2020/21.

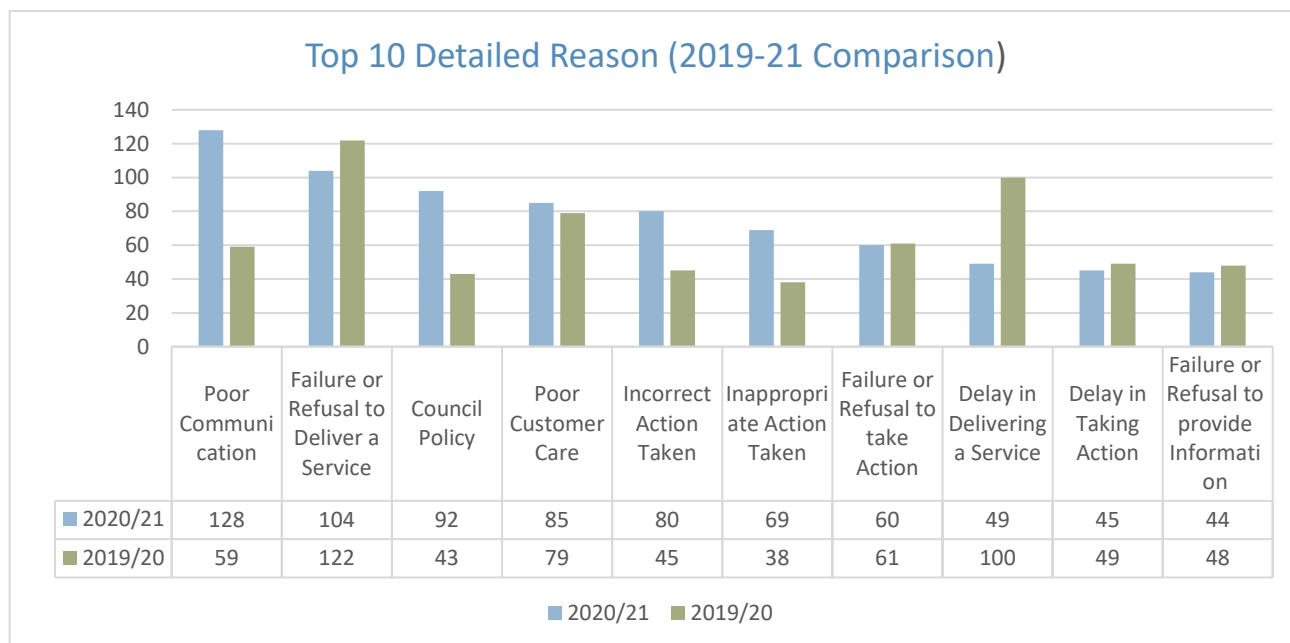


More detailed reasons (sub-categories) for complaints are also recorded against each of these 6 main reasons (categories).

5.2 The following table shows the Top 10 more detailed reasons (sub-categories) for complaints about Council Services in 2019/20. However, this breakdown *excludes Amey, Veolia, Housing & Neighbourhood Services and Repairs & Maintenance*)



Improvements in communication with complainants must be addressed, and support provided to Responding managers to ensure regular and timely updates. This will be included as part of the Complaints Transformation Project.



5.3 The table above compares the top 10 reasons for complaints with the previous year:

- The top 10 reasons for complaints for 2020/21 remain the same as those identified in the previous reporting year.
- 50% of complaint reasons showed an improvement from the previous year's figures.

Top 3 reasons for complaints in 2020/2021 were:

1. Poor Communication (128)
2. Failure or Refusal to Deliver a Service (104)
3. Council Policy (92)

Further improvements to customer satisfaction are required, especially in these three areas.

Poor customer care is unacceptable, and Service Managers should work with staff to ensure citizens are always treated with dignity and respect and that we listen and learn from the feedback they provide, showing empathy and professionalism when communicating with them.

6.0 Accessibility /Equality Monitoring Information

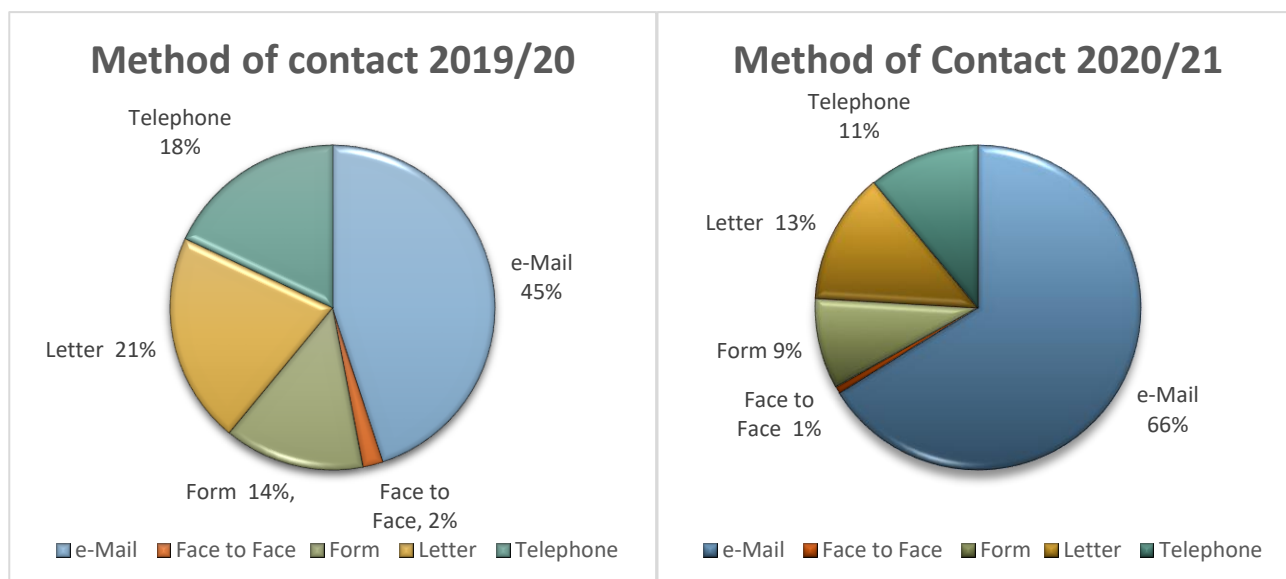
There is currently no mandatory requirement to capture demographic information (including equality information relating to protected characteristics such as gender reassignment, ethnicity, age, race, disability, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation) of complainants.

The recorded equality data is significantly limited and requires further development to ensure that Sheffield City Council can demonstrate that it provides fair and accessible services for all. This will be included as part of the Complaints Transformation Project.

7. How People Contact Us

It is our intention that people should be able to make a complaint in any way they choose, including through our website, by email, by telephone, in writing or in person.

7.1 The table below shows how citizens have interacted with us during 2020/21 to notify us they were dissatisfied and a comparison with 2019/20:



The information demonstrates the highest access channel for complaints is via e-mail although this has increased by 21% in comparison to 2019/20. The second highest access channel is by letter this has decreased by 8% and then phone which has decreased by 7%. (This information does not include problem solving data)

Further development is required to improve the digital offer for citizens when making a complaint. Accessibility for non-digital citizens should also be considered.

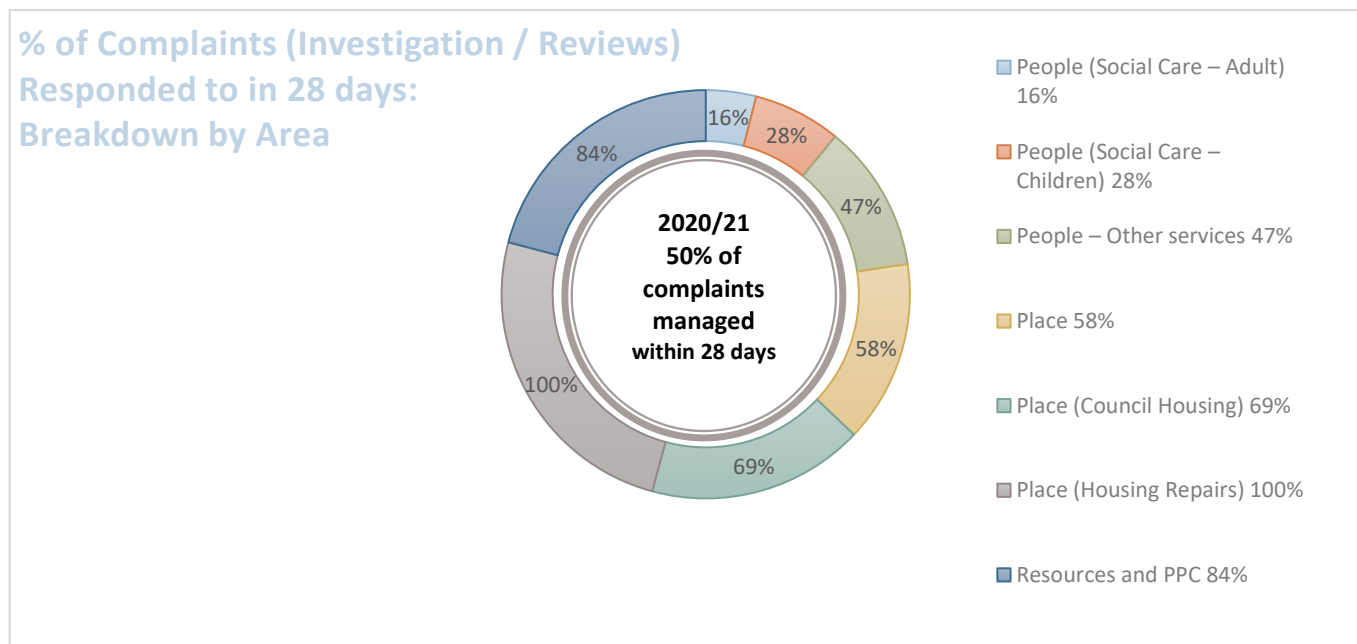
7.2 The table below shows contact via service:

Portfolio / Service Area (2020/21 Complaints)	ACCESS CHANNELS				
	Email	Face-Face	Form	Letter	Telephone
Adult Social Care (Statutory)	47	0	4	13	7
Adult Social Care (Corporate)	6	1	0	0	3
Children and Families (Statutory Stage 1)	37	0	15	6	11
Children and Families (Corporate)	32	0	3	8	9
Wider People	23	0	0	1	1
Resources inc. PPC	47	0	2	8	2
Place	73	0	6	6	5
Council Housing	16	1	7	9	8
Repairs	5	1	4	4	3
Total	286	3	41	55	49

8. Complaint Response Timescales

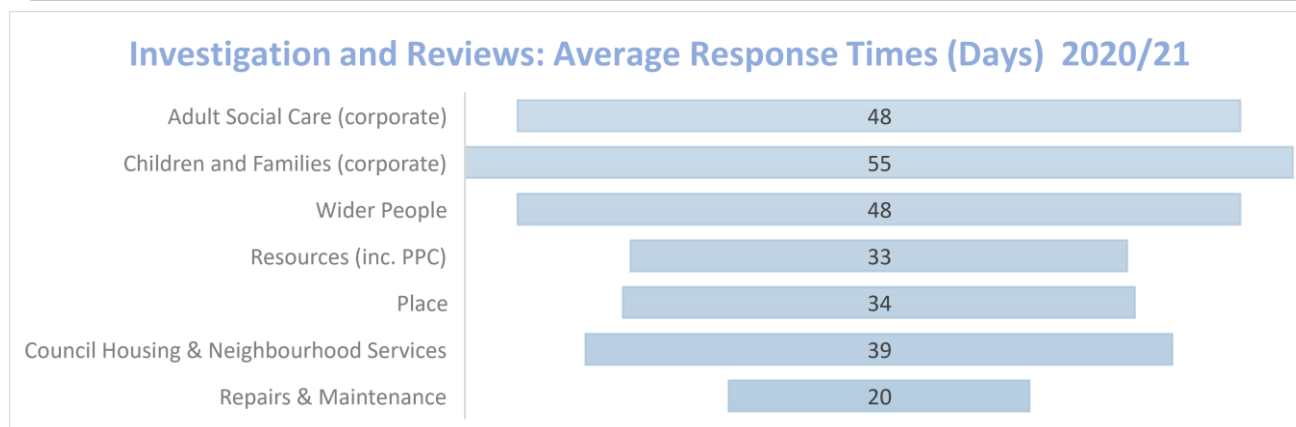
In line with the Corporate Complaints Procedure, Sheffield City Council aims to respond to complaints within 28 calendar days. Note - There are different timescales for complaints which follow the statutory procedure (Adults & Children's social care) and so these are not included in the chart below:

8.1 The chart below shows performance in the key service areas:



- 50% of complaints were responded to within 28 calendar days. This is a 19% decrease on the previous year. We believe that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted response times; however more work is needed to improve timeliness of response.
- The overall average number of days for responding to complaints in 2020/21 was 39 days. Again, this was to some extent due to the disruption to service during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Whilst Place (Housing / Repairs) responded to all of its complaints (18) within the timescales, it is important to note that only 47% of complaints resolved through problem solving were completed within timescales. This has resulted in high escalation levels (see 11.1).

Ongoing work required across all service areas to improve response times especially in complaints managed through the corporate procedure relating to Adults and Children's social care.



The data above does not include complaints resolved within 3 days via the problem-solving route

9. Complaint Outcomes

Sheffield City Council measures the outcomes from complaint investigations/reviews against five main areas:

Service failure remedied (upheld). This is where the complaint has been found to be completely justified and the service has accepted errors were made or inappropriate action(s) were taken.

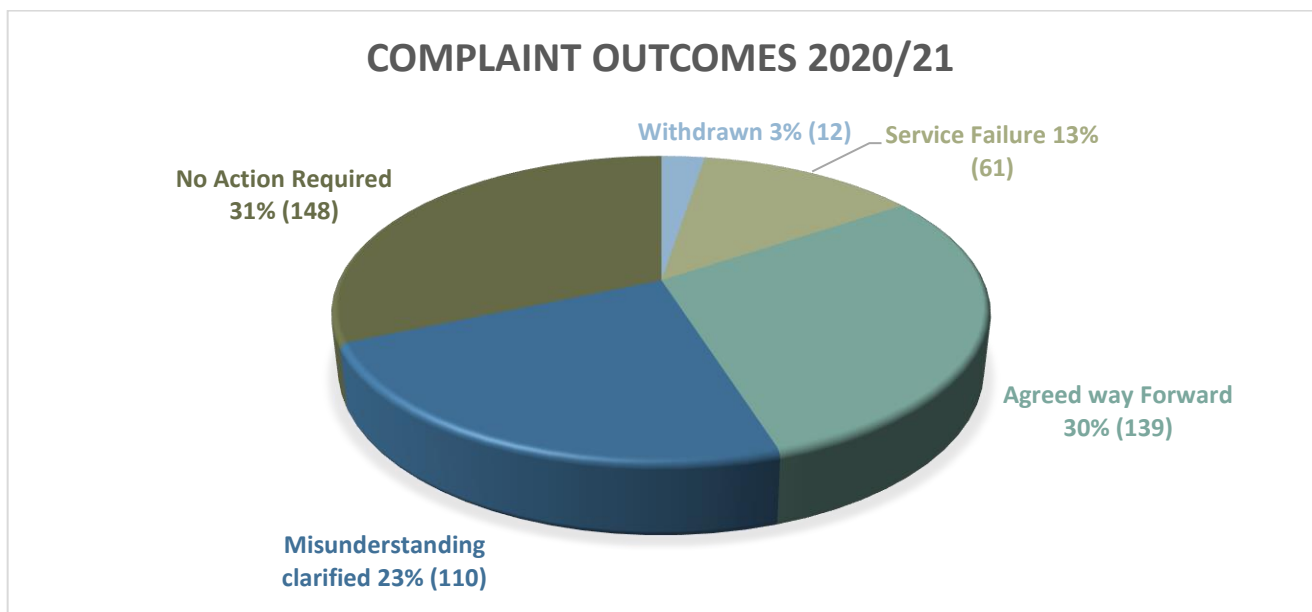
No action necessary (not upheld). This outcome is where the complaint has been found to be completely unjustified and the service is clear that there is no reasonable action which should be taken to improve any aspect of the matter complained about.

Agreed way forward (partially upheld). This is where some elements of the complaint are justified, whilst others are not. It is also where, although no inappropriate actions or decisions have been made, the complainant's viewpoint is accepted and there are ways in which improved ways of working could be adopted either for the individual concerned or for all users of the service.

Misunderstanding clarified. This is where, although there have been no inappropriate actions or decisions, the basis of the complaint is found to be a lack of understanding and the complaint response focuses on explaining why certain actions were taken in a manner which is resolution focused. It is likely that improved communication earlier may have prevented the complaint.

Withdrawn. This is when the complainant decides not to pursue their complaint prior to them receiving an outcome. A complaint is not treated as withdrawn if action has been taken to resolve the matter and a response has been made. A complaint is only withdrawn if the complainant did initially intend to make a complaint, then simply changes their mind.

In 2020/21 there were a total of 470 complaint responses issued that resulted in one of the 5 following outcomes:



Following the complaint response, where fault is found, Sheffield City Council recognises the need to apologise and to ensure corrective action is taken to remedy the issue and make service improvements as required.

Where we identify service failure, we aim to put the complainant back into the position they would have been in if the problem had not occurred; our approach to remedies is consistent with the principles used by the Local Government Ombudsman.

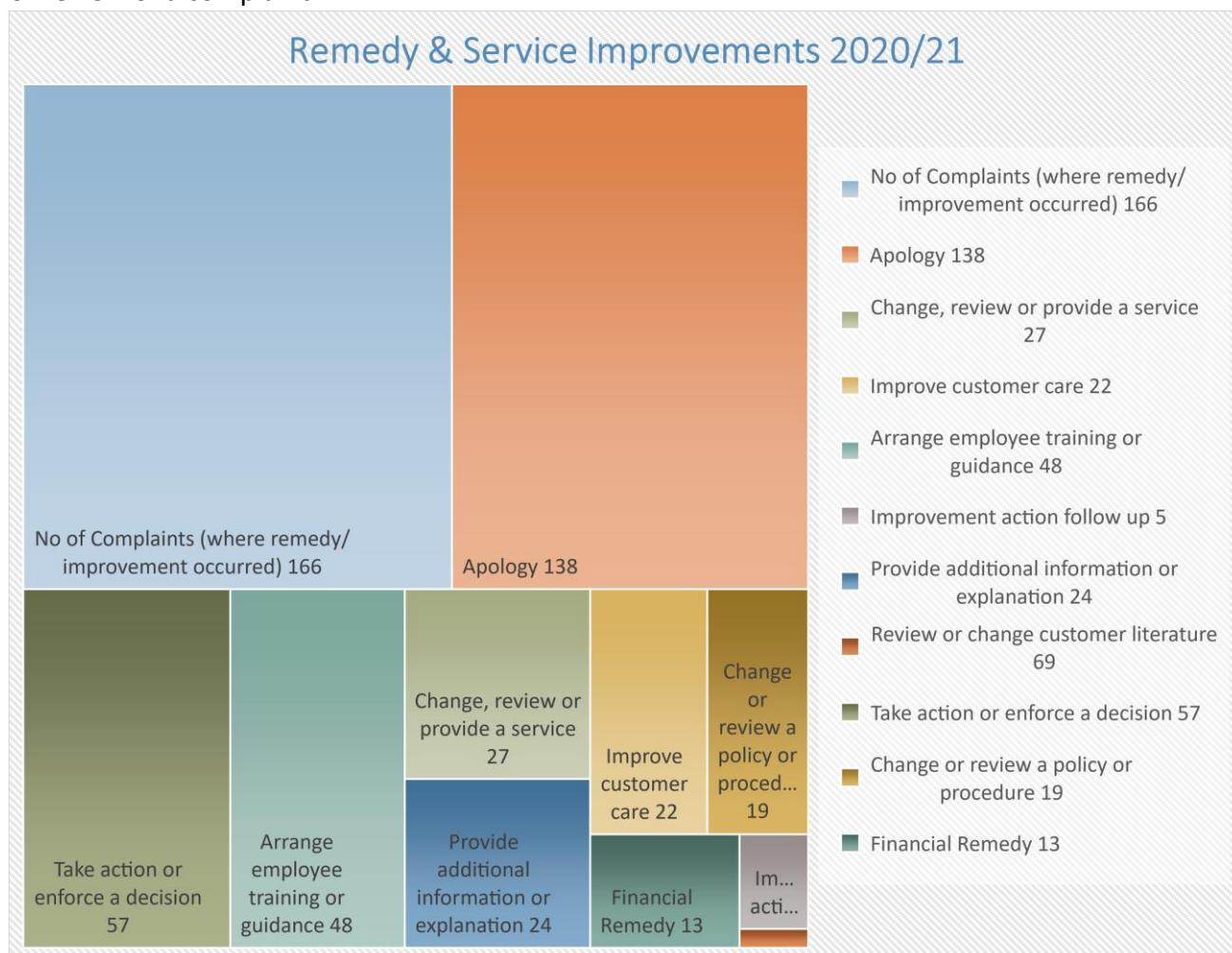
Service failure account for 13% (61) of complaints. (This does not include strategic partners)

Further development is required to review the above outcome definitions to ensure these are unambiguous and more clearly demonstrates where there has been even partial service failure (currently included in 'Agreed Way Forward' outcomes)

10. Complaint Remedies and Service Improvements

In 2020/21 Sheffield City Council recorded 352 remedies or service improvements in respect of only 166 complaints. Note - More than one remedy or service improvement can be recorded for a single complaint.

10.1 The chart below shows remedies and service improvements identified following investigation or review of a complaint:

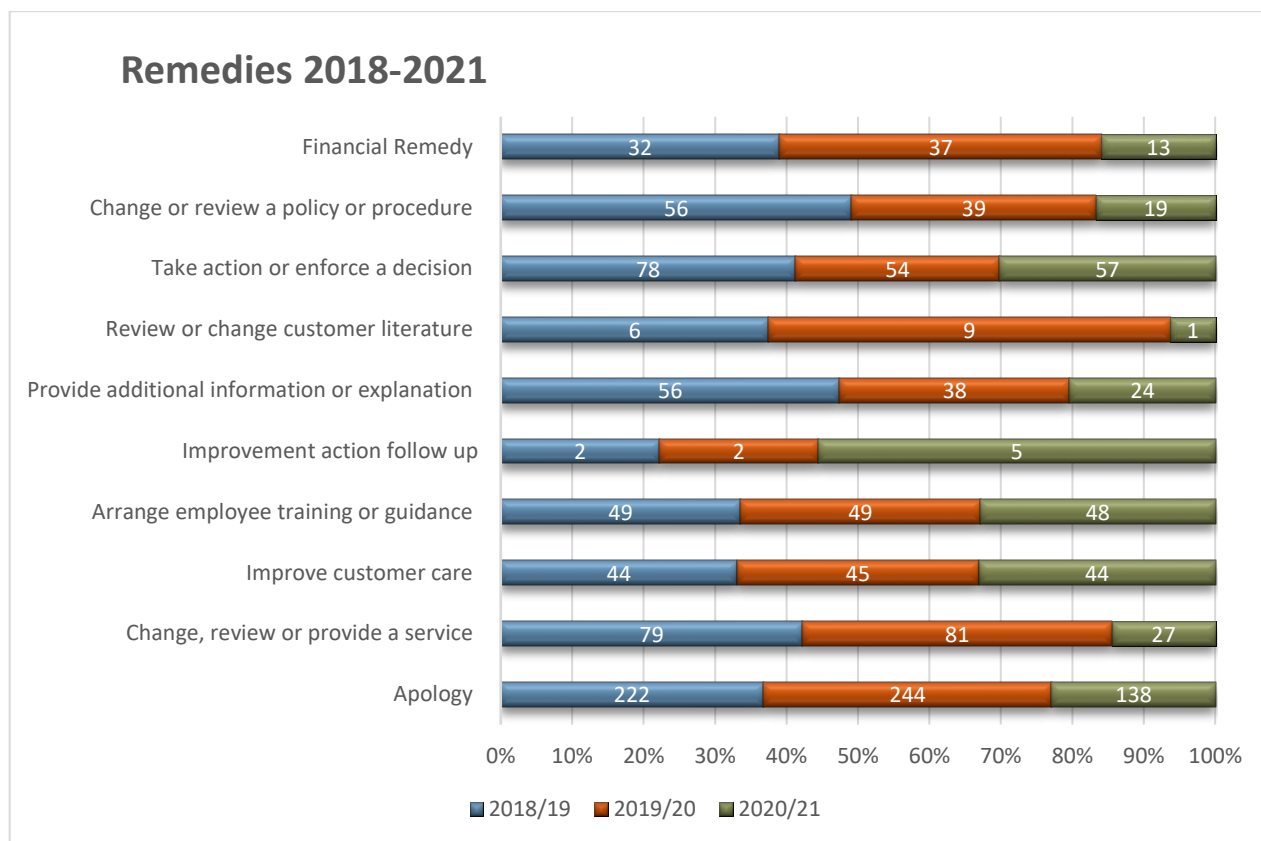


*This excludes Amey / Veolia data

Top 4 remedies and service improvements were:

1. Apology (138)
2. Take Action or Enforce a Decision (57)
3. Arrange Employee Training or Guidance (48)
4. Change, Review or Provide a Service (27)

10.2 The chart below shows a comparison of the same data (remedies and service improvements) over the past 3 years:



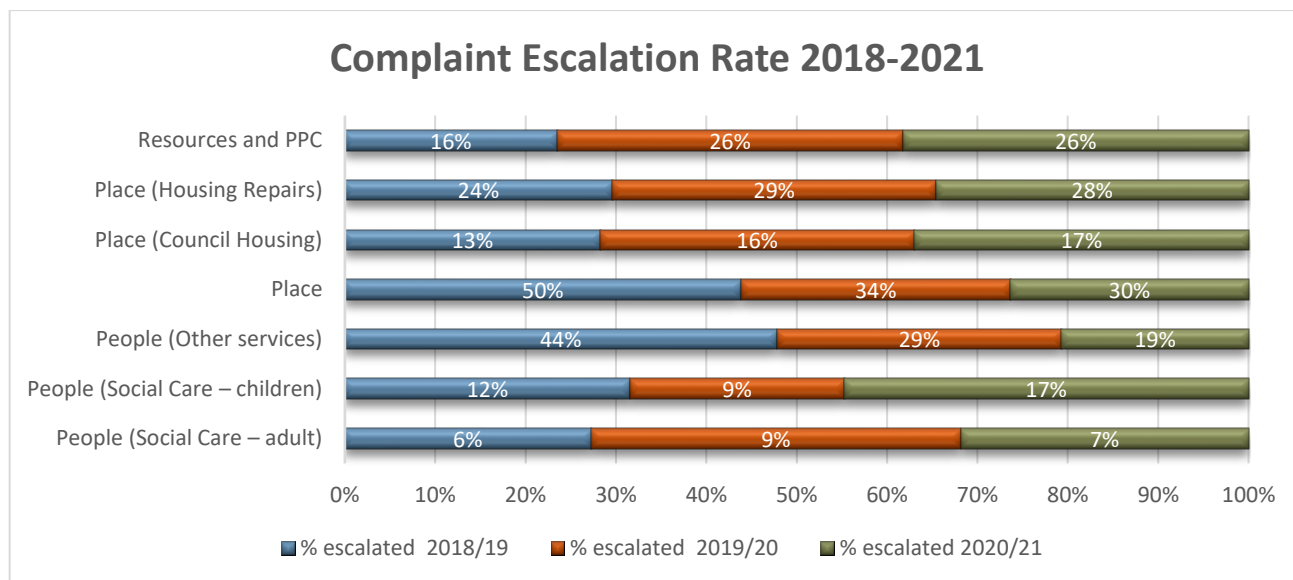
Improvements and support to services is needed to identify learning and to demonstrate to citizens how learning has been implemented, and to ensure that the recording of remedies is consistent across the organisation.

The implementation of a new complaints recording system at the start of November 2021 will capture this information moving forward.

11. Complaint Escalations

An important measure of successful complaint handling is the escalation rate i.e., the percentage of complaints where an initial response is issued, and the complainant remains dissatisfied and requests escalation of the response. Lower escalation rates improves customer satisfaction as it means complaints are dealt with to the customer's satisfaction as early as possible.

11.1 The chart below shows the escalation rates in each reporting area over the past 3 years:



- **Place (Excluding Housing and Repairs)** had the highest escalation rate of 30% in 2020/21 which is an improved position on previous years. However, throughout the past 3 years, Place (excluding Housing and repairs) have the highest escalation rate.
- **Place (Housing Repairs)** had the second highest number of escalations (28%) in 2020/21, although this an improvement on the previous year
- **Resources (including PPC)** had the third highest number of escalations (26%) in 2020/21 which remained the same as the previous year.

The average escalation rate is 21% in the reporting year 2020/21, this is an improvement on the two previous years. The average escalation rate for 2019/20 was 22% and for 2018/19 was 24%.

12. Ombudsman Complaints

For information pertaining to the Annual Ombudsman report, please see Appendix 2

13. Quality Assurance of Complaint Responses

A Quality Assurance Framework is embedded within Sheffield City Council to ensure the effective review of the standard of complaint responses. This places emphasis on customer focus (personal contact, empathy, positive tone, user friendliness) and the complaint outcome (clear explanation of investigation findings, remedies and signposting).

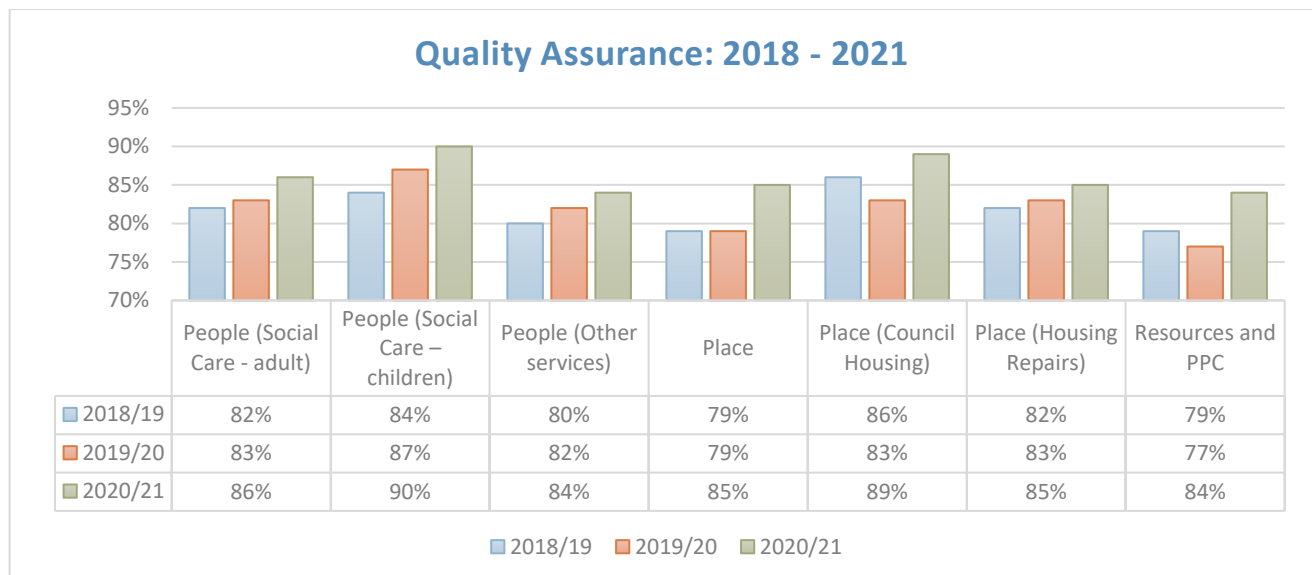
Each quarter the Customer Services Feedback and Complaints team takes a sample of responses which are evaluated against the framework as follows:

- Identify areas of improvement and good practice
- Use the outcome of the evaluation to provide a platform for guidance and development on complaint handling

The corporate target for Quality Assurance is 80%.

All areas have met or exceed the Quality Assurance Target for 2020/21 and improvement has been shown in all areas.

The table below shows the results for 2020/21 vs the previous 3 years:



The Quality Assurance Framework system requires review, and we propose that the benchmark is raised to 85% from 1st April 2022. All managers will continue to receive ongoing support and training to ensure quality responses. The Feedback & Complaints Team will continue to support services, highlighting any responses which fall significantly below this target.

14. Summary of Areas of Improvement

(As noted throughout this document):

Further investigation is required of high volumes of complaints linked to Strategic Partners

Improvements in communication with complainants must be addressed and support provided to responding managers to ensure regular and timely updates. This will be included as part of the Complaints Transformation Project.

Further improvements to customer satisfaction are required, especially in these three areas. Poor customer care is unacceptable, and Service Managers should work with staff to ensure citizens are always treated with dignity and respect and that we listen and learn from the feedback they provide, showing empathy and professionalism when communicating with them.

The recorded equality data is significantly limited and requires further development to ensure that Sheffield City Council can demonstrate that it provides fair and accessible services for all. This will be included as part of the Complaints Transformation Project.

Further development is required to improve the digital offer for citizens when making a complaint. Accessibility for non-digital citizens should also be considered.

Ongoing work required across all service areas to improve response times especially in complaints managed through the corporate procedure relating to Adults and Children's social care.

Further development is required to review the above outcomes definitions to ensure these are unambiguous and more clearly demonstrates where there has been even partial service failure (currently included in the 'Agreed Way Forward' outcome)

Improvement and Support to services is needed to identify learning and to demonstrate to citizens how learning has been implemented, as well as to ensure the recording of remedies is consistent across the organisation.

The implementation of a new complaints recording system at the start of November 2021 will capture this information moving forward.

The complaint process should be reviewed to include consistent recording of all complaints resolved including those resolved through problem solving (at the first point of contact, within 3 working days).

Currently not all Problem-Solving figures are included, and this does not reflect the true picture.

The new Complaints recording system introduced at the start of November 2021 has the facility to record all complaints received at the 'Problem Solving' stage. Training and Communications have been rolled out across Sheffield City Council to encourage engagement in this new process.

The Quality Assurance Framework requires review, and we propose that the benchmark is raised to 85% from 1st April 2022. All managers will continue to receive ongoing support and training to ensure quality responses. The Feedback & Complaints Team will continue to support Services, highlighting responses which fall significantly below this target.

15. Key Focus Areas and Future Developments

The Key Focus Area during 2021 has been to launch the new Feedback and Complaints Case Management system. This was successfully implemented on 2 November 2021.

- ❑ The new Feedback and Complaints Case Management System has been designed to capture all complaints (including those resolved at the Council's 'Problem Solving' stage) in one system. The 'One System One View' approach will ensure consistency in the recording of complaints regardless of access channel used or the service the complaint is recorded by.
- ❑ Recording all complaints information into one system will provide structured reporting across all three Council Portfolio Areas and will also provide valuable data to individual services to show how they are performing in key areas which we would like to improve.
- ❑ The reporting includes key themes such as timescales and indicating how long a complaint has been open. This will allow us to focus on responding to service users more efficiently.
- ❑ We have focused on Complaint Ownership and Accountability. The new complaints recording system builds in the role of an Accountable Manager for the Service who is responsible for ensuring adherence to the Complaints Policy.
- ❑ The reporting function for complaints will be less labour intensive and more automated to ensure information relating to complaints management is more accessible.
- ❑ The Feedback and Complaints Case Management System has a mandatory functionality to record Learning Outcomes in respect of each complaint. This will provide a valuable source of information to develop our services and to help colleagues to better meet the needs of our citizens.
- ❑ In addition to this, the Complaints and Feedback Team have launched a new SharePoint Site to support development and education around the Council's Complaints Policy and Procedures.
- ❑ Training has been completed by all Case Co-ordinators who are responsible for recording complaints on the new Feedback and Case Management System.
- ❑ The Feedback and Complaints Team will continue to provide training and support and will monitor the work of Responding Managers across the Council to ensure the effective transition to and improvement of complaint handling.
- ❑ The online training course for Effective Complaints Handling has been revised and relaunched from November 2021; this provides advice and support to all staff dealing with complaints.
- ❑ A revised virtual course 'Effective Complaints Handling' has been developed for Responding Managers (Investigating and Reviewing) and will commence in November 2021. From 2022 development of a virtual course for Accountable Managers will commence.

In addition, the new system will:

- Provide an opportunity to help customers feel listened to and to have an improved experience of dealing with us
- Work in a more efficient way with customer information
- Help us positively deal with feedback and complaints
- Help us to maintain better records concerning the feedback and complaints we receive
- Provide better oversight of the management and handling of customer feedback so that we learn from the things we do well and make improvements where necessary.

Other Future Developments and Focus from January 2022:

- ❑ A review of Member's Enquiries and alignment to the Feedback and Case Management System.
- ❑ Formation of a new Customer Panel to review, inform and support development and change.
- ❑ Introduction of a Customer Survey to review Complaint Management Performance.
- ❑ The introduction of more effective Equalities data and analysis to better understand complaints from citizens who have protected characteristics
- ❑ A new Complaint Performance and Learnings dashboard (New webpage to come)
- ❑ A continuation of a cultural change to 'Make Complaints Everyone's Business' focusing on the development of ownership and accountability.

16. How to Contact Us

If you would like to make a complaint, suggestion, or compliment, you can do this by completing an on-line form on Sheffield City Council's website:

<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/sheffield/home/your-city-council/complaints.html>

You can also telephone us on 0114 273 4567, or write to: Customer Services, Sheffield City Council, Town Hall, Pinstone Street, Sheffield S1 2HH

If you would like to comment on this report, or have any questions about the complaint's procedure, please contact the Customer Feedback and Complaints Team at:

Email complaintsmanagers@sheffield.gov.uk

Telephone 0114 273 4567 or write to us at the address given above.