



Annual Complaints Report 2019 - 2020

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1. Introduction

All councils need to provide complaint procedures to respond to citizen's 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 2019 – 31 March 2020, 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 then used to assist with the emergency response. As a result this report is being issued at the same time as the Annual Complaint Report for the period 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021.
- 1.3 The 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 effectively and timely.
- 1.5 Sheffield City Council has 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 it was handled. There are separate specific statutory procedures for handling Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care complaints. The annual statutory reports for these are available here: [Complaints - Data Mill North](#)
- 1.6 The data in this report includes complaints considered at the Investigation and Review stages. Complaints resolved via problem solving is currently not reported.
- 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); Veolia (Waste Management) and Capita (revenues and benefits). See Section 4.
- 1.8 Sheffield City Council's Customer Services Feedback & Complaints Team 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 : [Sheffield City Council - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

2. Headlines

32% decrease in total number of complaints received from previous year

2018/19: 3042 Complaints



2019/20: 2068 Complaints

Sheffield City Council's 2 strategic partners received **the highest number of complaints** (Amey 49%, Veolia 16%) – see Table 3.1

The top 3 Council Services receiving the highest number of complaints are: Children's social care (8%), Council Housing* (6%) and Adults social care 5%
(includes Housing and Neighbourhood Services complaints) – see Table 4.1

67% 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 19%** in 2019/20, this is an improvement on the two previous years. The average escalation rate for 2018/19 was 20% and 2017/18 was 23%.- see Table 11.1

The most **frequent reason** for complaints was **Quality of service*** and accounts for 25% of all complaint categorisations (1582 of 6236)
(See Appendix 1 for definitions)* - see Table 5.1

In addition to offering citizens an apology (244), **the top 3 remedies and service improvements were:** Change review or provide a service (81); Take action or enforce a decision (54); and Provide or review employee training or guidance (49) – see Table 10.1

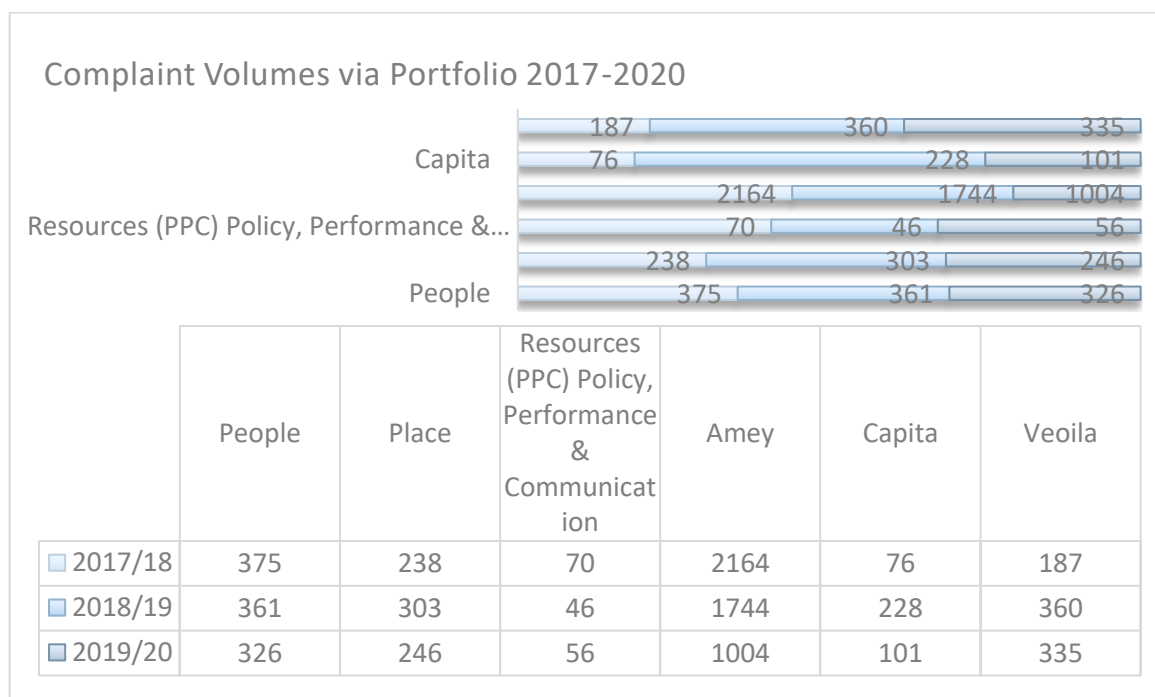
The number of **compliments** recorded decreased by **10%**
(379 compared to 421) recorded in previous year)

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

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

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 32% decrease in the number of complaints received than in the previous year. Five out of the six portfolio areas have shown a decrease in complaints.
- The overall decrease in complaints received may be predominantly attributed to the fall in complaints recorded by the Council's strategic partner, Amey.
Major works undertaken by Amey in 2017/18, included tree removals and road/ highways re-surfacing works which was completed 2018/19. These core investment programmes led to high levels of public interest & concern, causing the increase in the number of complaints.
- The reduction in Capita complaints is attributed to these services being taken back in-house part way through the 2019/20 reporting.
- Resources Portfolio has had a 22% increase.

3.2 Resources Portfolio Increase:

This increase in the number of complaints recorded for Resources Portfolio was due to increase in Customer Services complaints in both Contact Centre (Revenue & Benefits) and Fulfilment (blue badge)

This resulted in changes in this service area around the blue badge assessment criteria and a change to policy to include hidden disabilities.

Remedies have been put in place around the assessment criteria and the Fulfilment Team have now worked the backlog of hidden disability applications following the change to policy which should show improvement moving forward.

- Regarding Revenue and Benefits increase in complaints, this was largely due to increased waiting times of citizens who were trying to contact us by telephone

4. 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	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
People	Social Care – Adults	152	135	105
	Social Care – Children	194	190	165
	People – Other	29	36	56
	People Total	375	361	326
Place	Council Housing incl. Housing & Neighbourhood Services	106	102	119
	Council Housing Repairs	22	34	35
	Environmental Services	5	7	6
	Waste Management Client Team	32	101	39
	Culture & Environment	5	8	6
	City Growth	39	29	30
	Traffic & Parking	23	14	9
	Transport & Facilities Management	5	6	2
	Place – Other	1	2	0
	Place Total	238	303	246
Resources, including Policy Performance and Communication (PPC)	Customer Services	46	32	35
	Legal	0	2	1
	Finance & Commercial	19	8	9
	Other	5	4	11
	Resources & PPC Total	70	46	56
Amey	Streets Ahead	2164	1744	1004
Capita	Benefits	16	177	76
	Revenues	60	51	25
	Capita Total	76	228	101
Veolia	Waste Management	187	360	335
Overall Total		3110	3042	2068

In 2019/20:

Strategic Partner Complaints (Amey, Veolia and Capita) account for 70% (1440) of the total number of complaints. However this is a decrease the amount received the previous year 76% (2332).

- Amey (Streets Ahead) total number of complaints have decreased with the scheduled highway and replacement plans reaching closure.
- Veolia (SCC Waste Management Service) complaints increased in the previous year due to the introduction of a new recycling service. However as expected this year, these figures are decreasing.

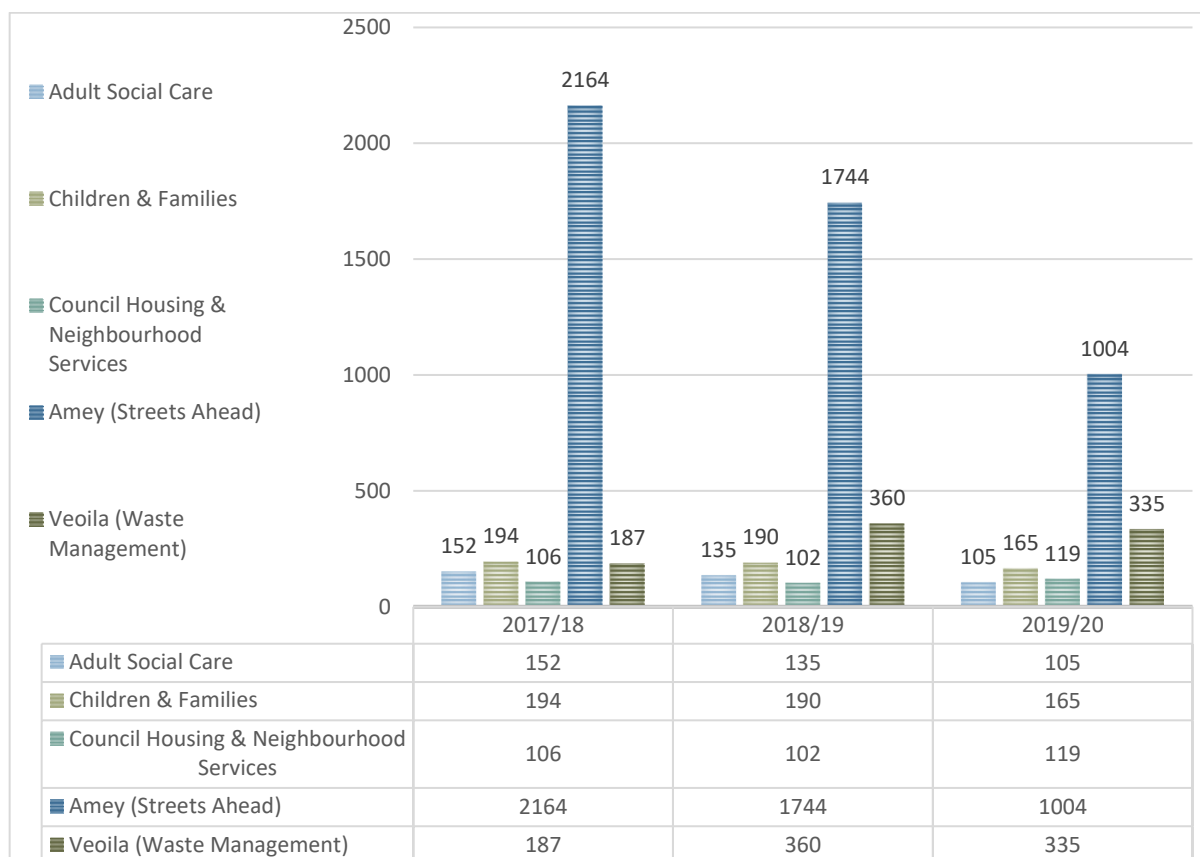
People Portfolio accounts for 16% (326) of the total number of complaints received in 2019/20. However, this is a decrease of 10% (35) on the previous year.

Place Portfolio accounts for 12%(246) of the total number of complaints. However, this is a 19% (57) decrease on the previous year.

Resources Portfolio (including PPC) accounts for 3% of the total number of complaints. However there has been a 22% (10)increase on the previous year.

(See 4.1 above).

4.2 The graph below shows the council service areas where highest volumes of complaints were recorded during 2019/20 and comparison over the past 3 years 2017 - 2020:



Adult & Children's Social Care recorded the highest complaint category as 'Quality of Service'

Amey (Streets Ahead) recorded the highest complaint category as 'Quality of Service'

Council Housing (including Housing and Neighbourhoods services recorded the highest complaint recording category as 'Failure or Refusal of Service'

Veolia (Waste Management) recorded the highest complaint category as 'Policy & Legislation'

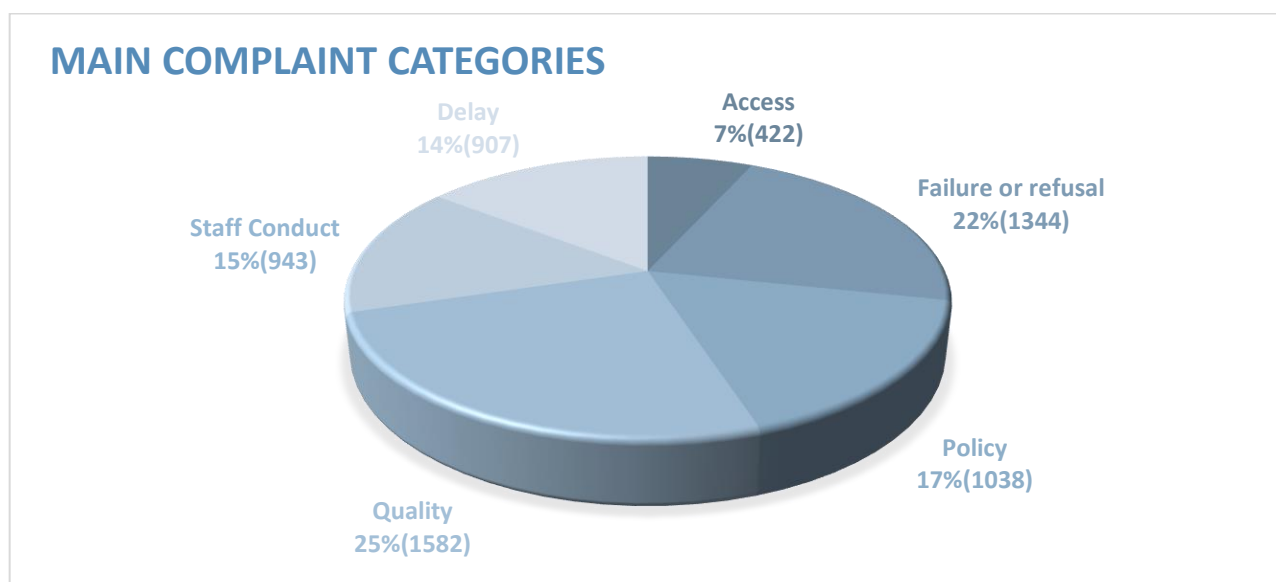
5. Complaint Categorisation

It is important 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).

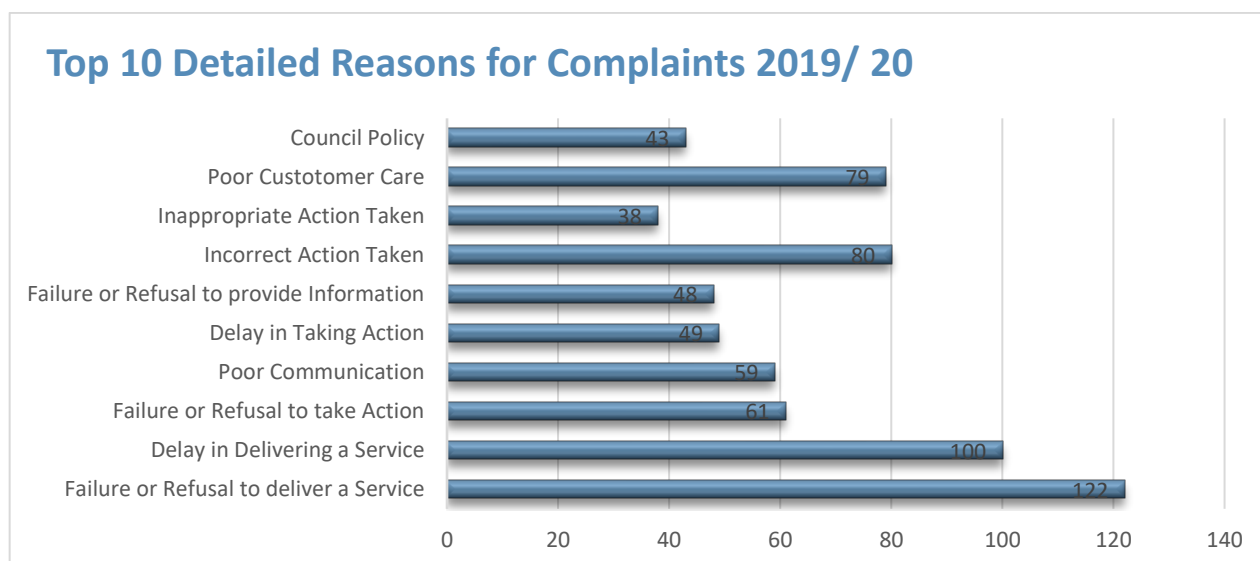
'Quality of Service' is the highest reason for complaints received in the reporting year 2019/20.

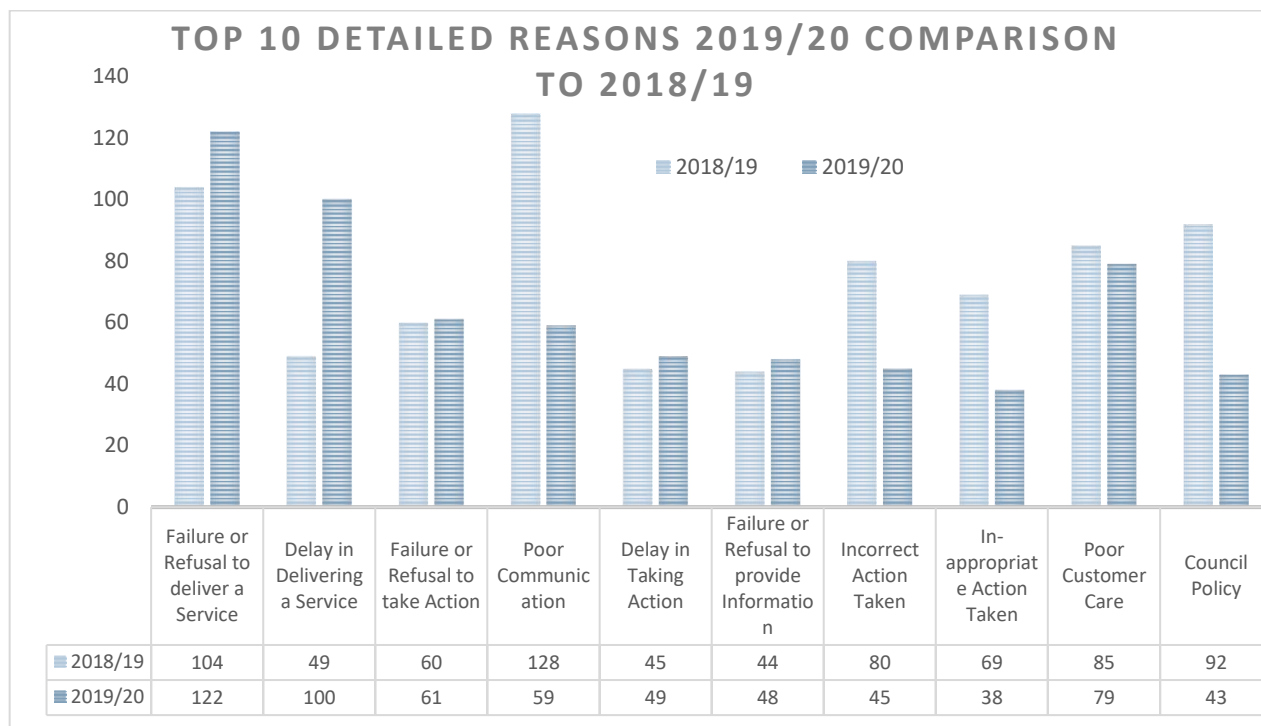


* This data (5.1) includes all strategic partners and all service areas

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

5.2 The table below 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**





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

- The top 10 reasons for complaints for 2019/20 remain the same as those identified in 2018/19.
- 5 out of the 10 sub-categories of complaint reasons showed an improvement on the previous year's figures.

Top 3 reasons for complaint in 2019/2020 were:

1. Failure of refusal to deliver a service (122)
2. Delay in delivering a service (100)
3. Poor customer care (79)

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. Accessibility /Equality Monitoring Information

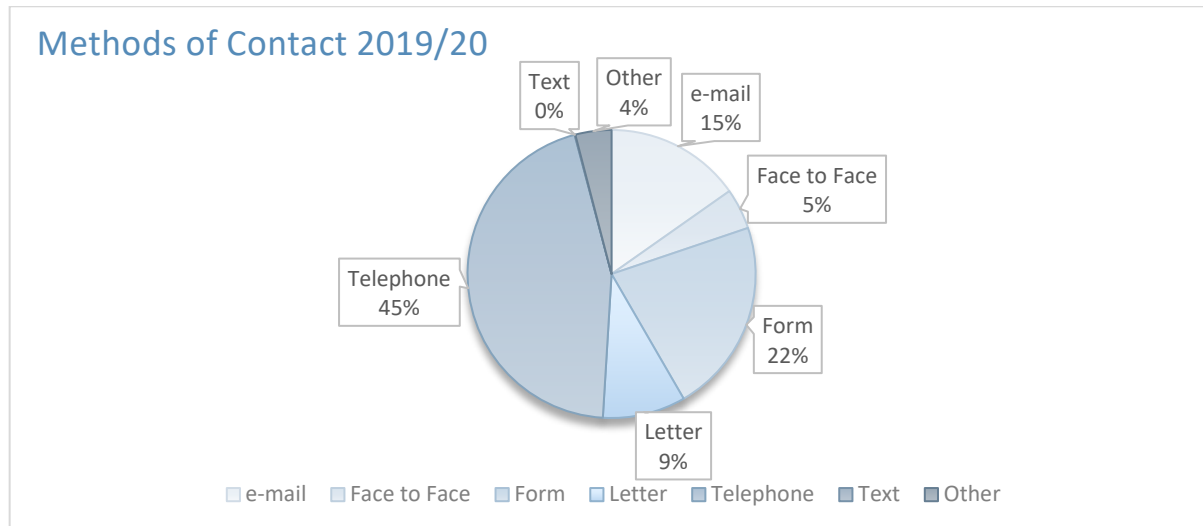
There is currently no mandatory requirement to capture demographic (including equality information relating to protected characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age include full list) of complainants.

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.

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. We do not need a complaint in writing.

7.1 The table below shows how people have interacted with us during 2019/20 to notify us they were dissatisfied:



The information demonstrates the highest access channel for complaints is via phone, with the second highest access channel being an on-line form and then email. The previous year demonstrated the main method of contact was via email.

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

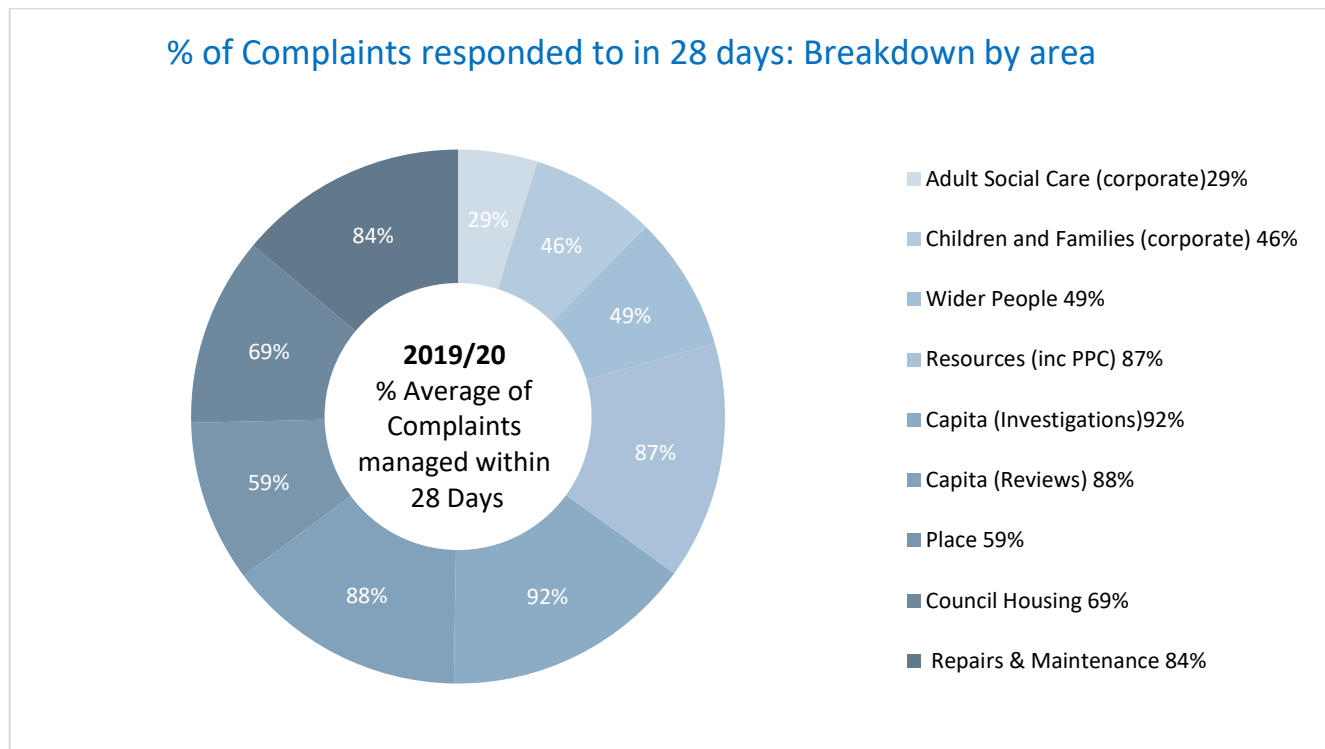
7.2 The table below shows contact via service:

ACCESS CHANNELS (2019/20 Complaints)	Email	Face-Face	Form	Letter	Telephone	Text
Adult Social Care (Statutory)	34	0	23	23	15	
Adult Social Care (Corporate)	3	0	3	3	1	0
Children & Families (Statutory)	34	0	32	22	29	
Children and Families (Corporate)	15	0	14	4	15	
Wider People	45	1	0	6	4	
Resources inc. PPC	35	1	10	3	7	
Capita	63	0	6	31	1	
Place	66	1	7	12	10	
Amey						
Veolia	22	0	0	0	157	3
Council Housing	72	56	226	138	271	
Repairs	180	113	503	109	1697	
Total	576	173	825	352	2209	3

8. Complaint Response Timescales

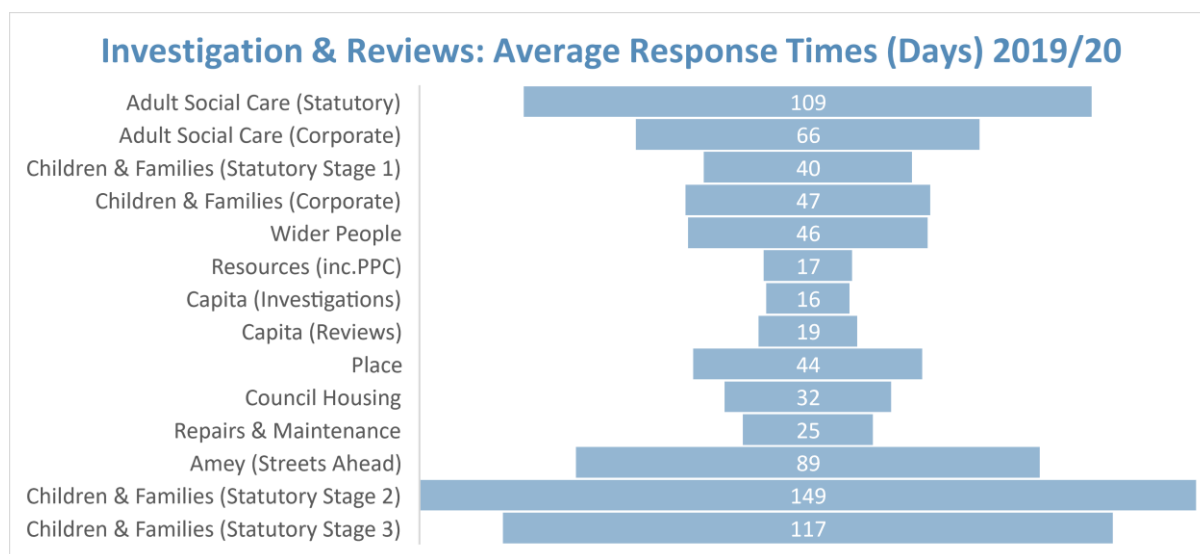
Sheffield City Council aims to respond to complaints within 28 calendar days which follow the corporate procedure, Note - There are different timescales for complaints which follow the statutory procedure (Adults & Children's social care) and so these are not included in the chart below:

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



- 69% of complaints were responded to within 28 calendar days.
- The overall average number of days for responding to complaints in 2019/20 was 34 days.

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 problem solving

9. Complaint Outcomes

Sheffield City Council measure 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.

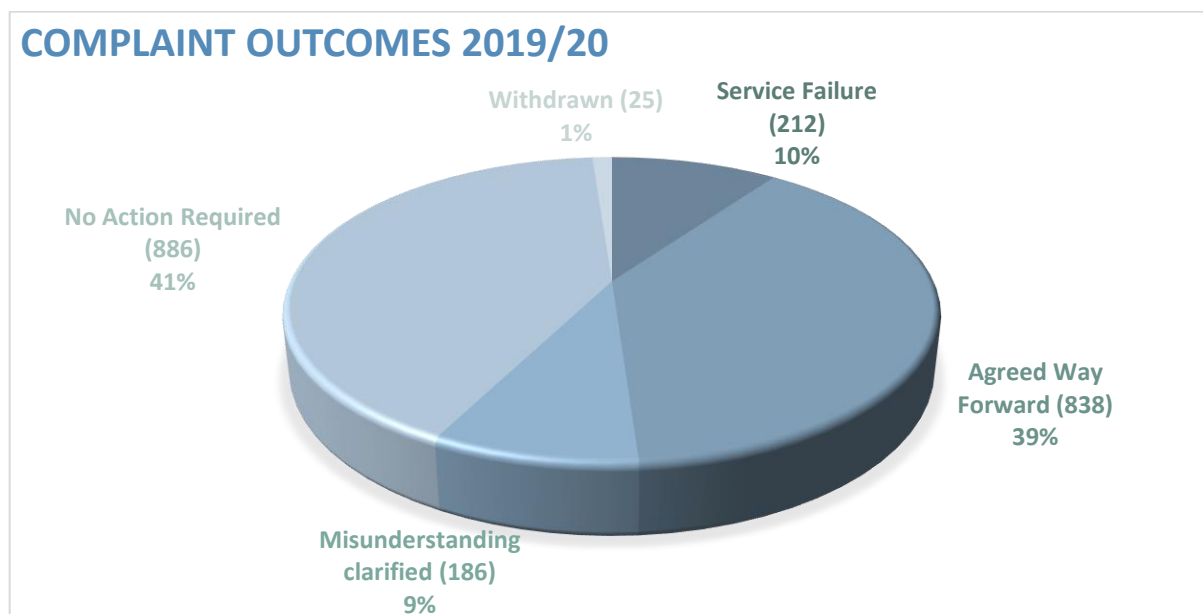
No action necessary (not upheld). This outcome is where the complaint has been found to be completely unjustified and the service is clear that there is no reasonable action which should be taken to improve any aspect of the matter complained about.

Agreed way forward (partially upheld). This is where some elements of the complaint are justified, yet 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 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 2019/2020 there were a total of 2147 complaint responses issued that resulted in one of the 5 following outcomes:



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

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

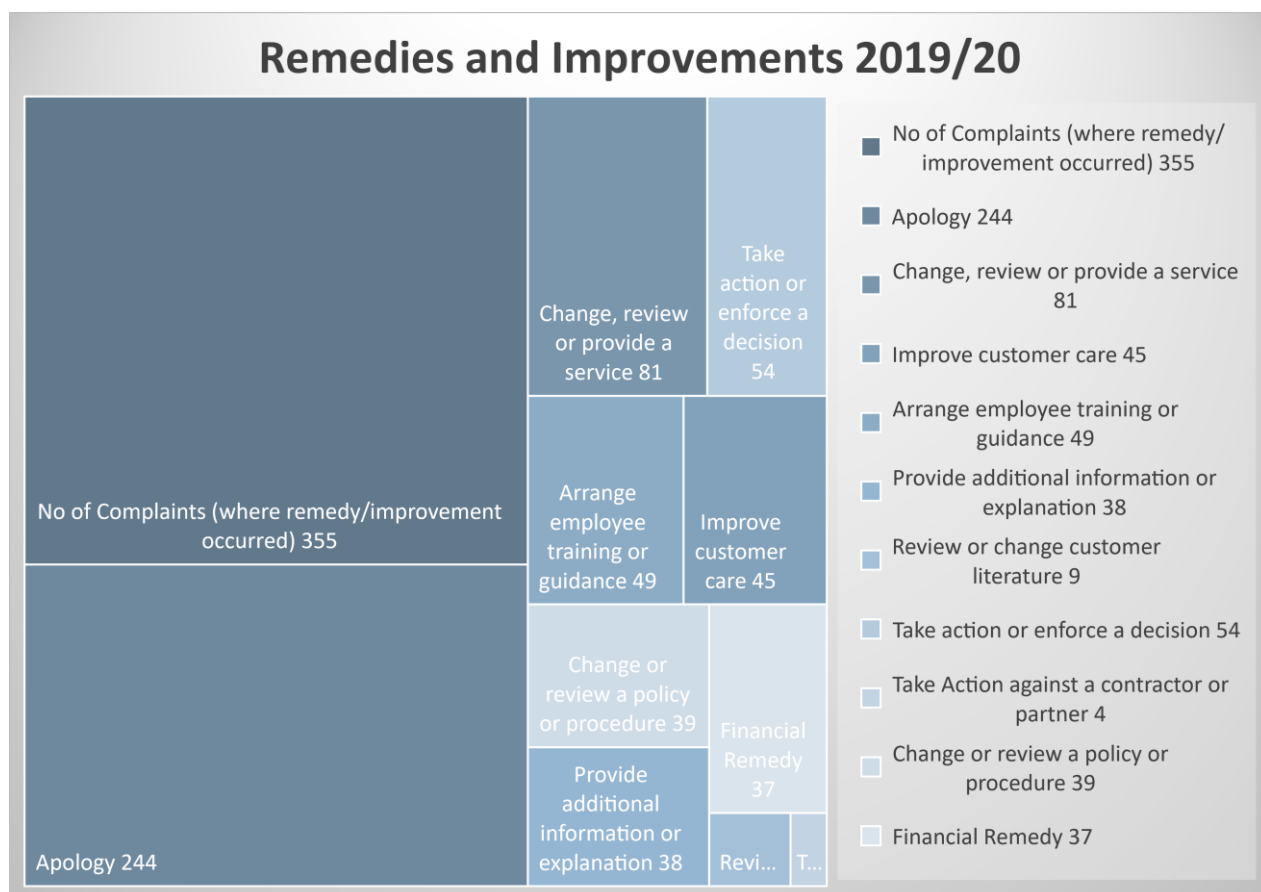
Service failure account for 10% (212) of complaints. (includes all strategic partners and all services)

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. 'Agreed Way Forward' outcome)

10. Complaint Remedies and Service Improvements

In 2019/20 Sheffield City Council recorded remedies or service improvements in respect of only 355 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:

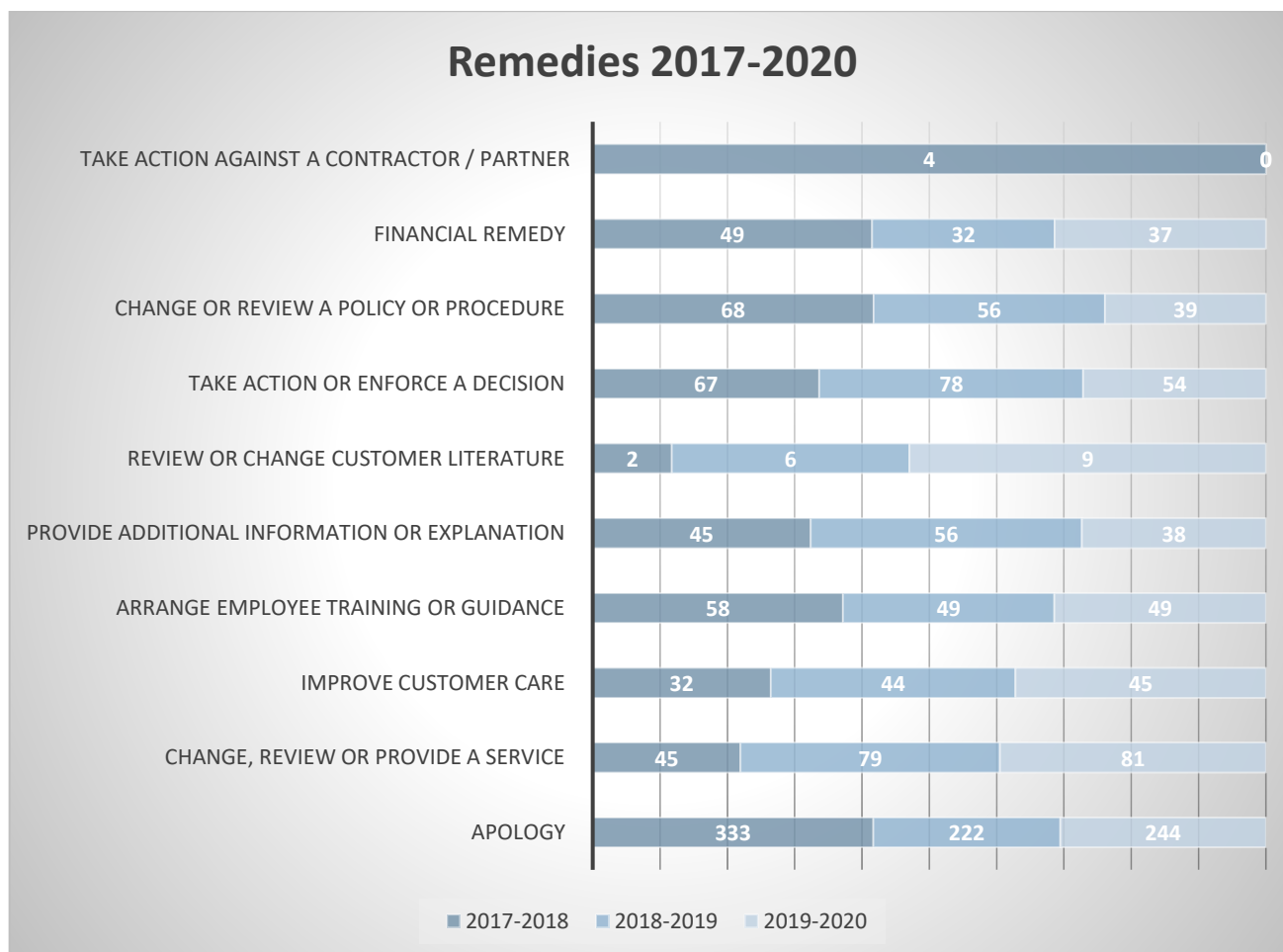


.*This excludes Amey / Veolia data

Top 4 remedies and service improvements were:

1. Apology (244)
2. Change review or provide a service (81)
3. Take action or enforce a decision (54)
4. Provide or review employee training or guidance (49)

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

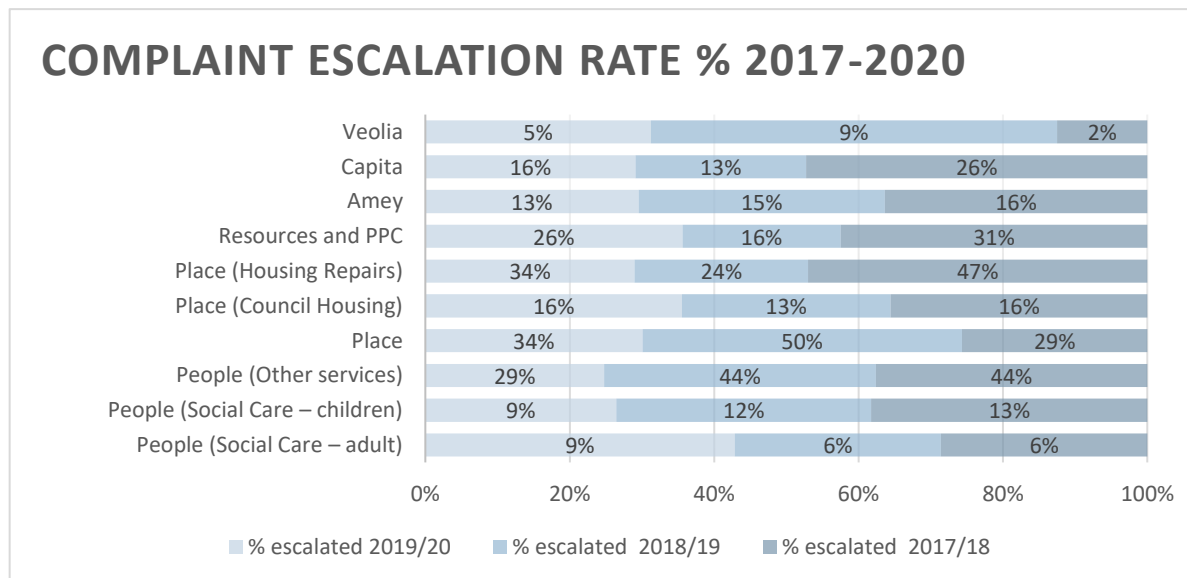


Further development is required to ensure processes are in place to support Services to identify learning from remedies provided and that the Council can demonstrate both internally and to citizens how learning has been implemented to improve service delivery and customer satisfaction. Also, to ensure the recording of remedies is consistent across the organisation.

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 as early as possible.

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



- **Place** and **Place (Housing Repairs)** both had the highest escalation rate of 34% in 2019/20. There has been an improvement in Place but escalations have increased in Housing Repairs than in the previous year.
- **People** (excluding social care) had the second highest number of escalations (29%) in 2019/20, although this an improvement on the previous year
- **Resources (including PPC)** had the third highest number of escalations (26%) in 2019/20 and has increased since the previous year.

The average escalation rate is 19% in the reporting year 2019/20, this is an improvement on the two previous years. The average escalation rate for 2018/19 was 20% and 2017/18 was 23%.

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 these figures are excluded and does not reflect the true picture of early resolution via escalation.

12. Ombudsman Complaints

See Appendices

13. Quality Assurance of Complaint Responses

A Quality Assurance Framework is embedded within Sheffield City Council to review the standards of complaint responses.

It places emphasis on customer focus (personal contact, empathy, positive tone, user friendly) and the complaint outcome (clear explanation of investigation findings, remedies and signposting).

Customer Services, Feedback and Complaints team, each quarter will take 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%.

The table below shows the results for 2019/20 vs the previous 3 years:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
People: Adult Health & Social Care	77%	82%	83%
People: Children & Families	77%	84%	87%
People: Other services	76%	80%	82%
Place	82%	79%	79%
Place: Council Housing	89%	86%	83%
Place: Housing Repairs	83%	82%	83%
Resources and PPC	79%	79%	77%
Capita	80%	78%	89%

The Quality Assurance Framework requires review to ensure the benchmark is set correctly and that all managers 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.

14. Future Developments and Key Focus Areas

See 2020/21 Annual Complaints report for a comprehensive list of Future Developments and Key Focus Areas

15. 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 complaints 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.