

Q4 2019-20 COMPLAINTS REPORT

Report of the Corporate Director for CSS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Stockport Council and Stockport Homes welcome feedback from their customers and have accessible, well-publicised complaints processes in place. An intrinsic part of both organisations' culture is to actively seek and learn from customer feedback to improve services. The purpose of this report is to provide a comparison of complaints received in 2019/20 with the previous year's complaints.

1.2 This report is structured as follows:

- Performance overview
- Overview of Stage 1 & Stage 2 Corporate Complaints
- Overview of statutory Adults Social Care Complaints (ASC)
- Overview of statutory Children's Social Care Complaints
- Overview of complaints about Stockport Homes
- Overview of complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)
- Overview of complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman (HO)
- Lessons learnt as a result of complaints

1.3 Within each section, complaints information is provided in relation to:

- Numbers of complaints received
- Percentage of complaints upheld
- Percentage of complaints dealt with within agreed timescales

2.0 2019-20 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

2.1 A total of 536 complaints were received in 2019-20, compared with 523 complaints in 2018/19, and 449 complaints in 2017/18.

2.2 There has been a steady increase in complaints over recent years. In particular, Stage 1 Corporate Complaints (178 complaints received) and Stage 2 Corporate Complaints (102 complaints received) have increased¹, although it is difficult to identify many trends from the data, given the range of issues complained about across different service areas.

2.3 In contrast, Statutory ASC Complaints (167 complaints received) and Statutory Children's Social Care Complaints (41 complaints received) have reduced this year, compared to last year.²

2.4 43 LGSCO complaints were received in 2019-20, compared with 62 in 2018-19

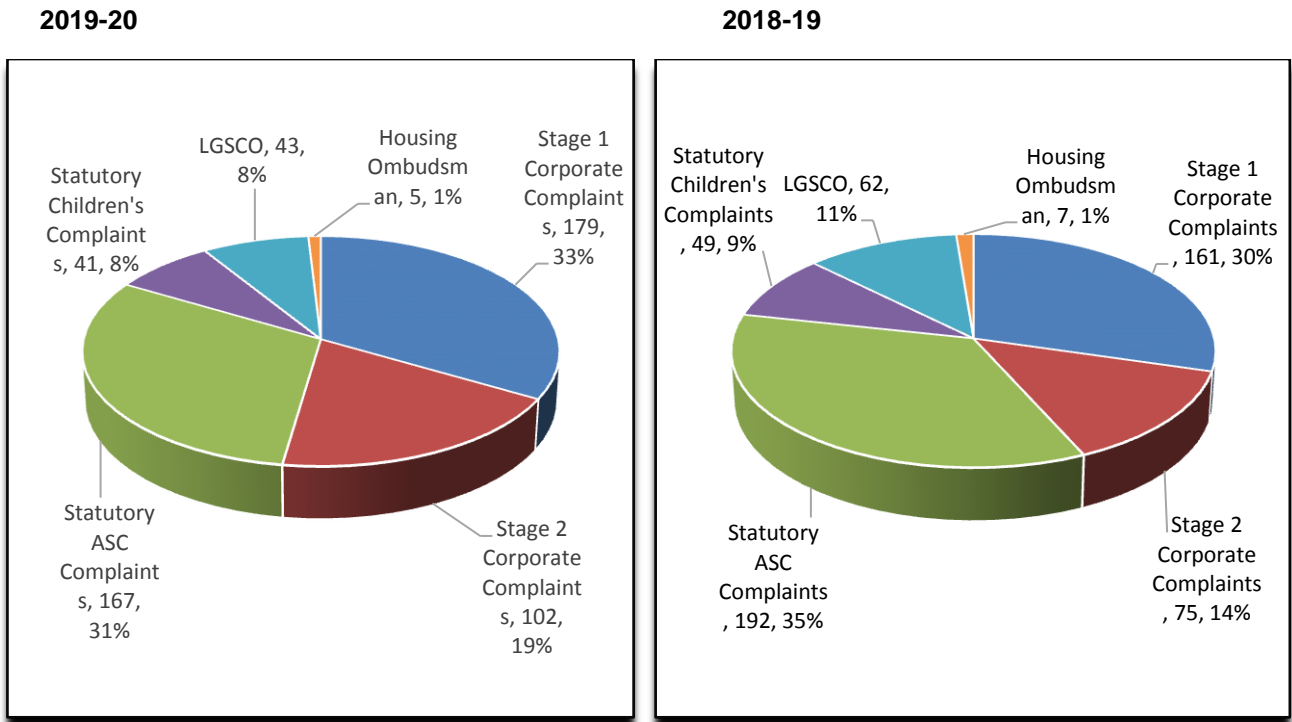
¹ 161 Stage 1 and 75 Stage 2 Corporate Complaints were received in 2018-19.

² 192 Statutory ASC complaints and 49 Statutory Children's Social Care Complaints were received respectively in 2018-19.

(please note the LGSCO is yet to release its Annual Review for 2019-20, so the figure for this year is likely to be higher than 40).

2.5 5 HO complaints received in 2019-20, compared with 7 in 2018-19.

Graph 1 – A comparison of complaints received in 2019-20 with 2018-19:



2.6 Table 1 provides a breakdown of complaints received by Directorate at each stage of the complaints process.

TABLE 1: Number of complaints received in 2019/20 (figures for 2018/19 are detailed in brackets):

Directorate	Stage 1					Stage 2					LGSCO				
	Q1 19/20	Q2 19/20	Q3 19/20	Q4 19/20	Total YTD	Q1 19/20	Q2 19/20	Q3 19/20	Q4 19/20	Total YTD	Q1 19/20	Q2 19/20	Q3 19/20	Q4 19/20	Total YTD
Services to People (Adults)	53 (40)	45 (58)	41 (48)	28 (48)	167 (194)	1 (1)	- (1)	1 (1)	- (-)	2 (3)	5 (-)	2 (2)	1 (2)	5 (1)	13 (5)
Services to People (Children's)	7 (15)	16 (28)	22 (19)	29 (19)	74* (81)	3 (2)	2 (1)	3 (1)	1 (-)	9 (4)	1 (4)	5 (5)	- (-)	2 (-)	8 (9)
Corporate and Support Services	11 (9)	19 (11)	22 (19)	13 (11)	65 (50)	8 (5)	4 (5)	9 (6)	6 (4)	27 (20)	1 (5)	6 (4)	- (2)	1 (1)	8 (12)
Services to Place	22 (21)	16 (25)	29 (25)	13 (10)	80 (81)	15 (13)	17 (10)	19 (16)	13 (9)	64 (48)	2 (3)	6 (2)	1 (3)	4 (1)	13 (8)
Total	93 (85)	96 (122)	114 (111)	84 (88)	386 (406)	27 (21)	23 (17)	32 (24)	20 (13)	102 (75)	9 (12)	19 (13)	2 (7)	12 (3)	42** (35)

*This figure is made up of 41 Statutory Social Care Complaints and 33 Corporate Complaints.

**1 additional complaint was made that the council had failed to respond to correspondence (the LGSCO did not uphold the complaint).

3.0 PERFORMANCE IN RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS IN 2019-20

3.1 Complaints upheld or partially upheld

3.1.1 Stage 1 Corporate Complaints

3.1.2 37% of Stage 1 complaints were either upheld or partially upheld in 2019-20, compared with 28% in 2018/19.

3.2 Stage 2 Corporate Complaints

3.2.1 36% of Stage 2 complaints were either upheld or partially upheld In 2019-20, compared with 24% in 2018-19.

3.3 LGSCO and HO Complaints

3.3.1 The LGSCO and HO categories, which are used to reflect whether or not a complaint is upheld (fully or partially), are indicated by findings of 'maladministration'. Upheld complaints may show some evidence of maladministration (or fault) but such findings fall short of the serious cases of maladministration which are detailed in full reports issued in the public interest.

3.3.2 There were no public reports issued against the council in 2019-20, compared with 1 report issued in 2018-19.

3.3.3 The LGSCO upheld 8 complaints about the council this year, compared with an identical number upheld in 2018-19.

3.3.4 This year, the HO upheld 2 complaints about Stockport Homes, compared with 3 complaints in 2018-19.

3.4 Timeliness of complaints handling

3.4.1 The Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure acknowledges the need for complaints to be dealt with in a timely manner but most importantly, that complaints are dealt with fairly and thoroughly. In line with best practice, both Stage 1 and 2 complaints should be responded to within 20 days.

3.5 Stage 1

3.5.1 This year, 88% of Stage 1 complaints investigated were responded to within the agreed timescale, compared with 91% last year.

3.6 Stage 2

3.6.1 This year, 74% of Stage 2 complaints investigated were responded to within the agreed timescale, compared with 77% last year.

4.0 OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS BY DIRECTORATE

4.1 Services to People (Adults)

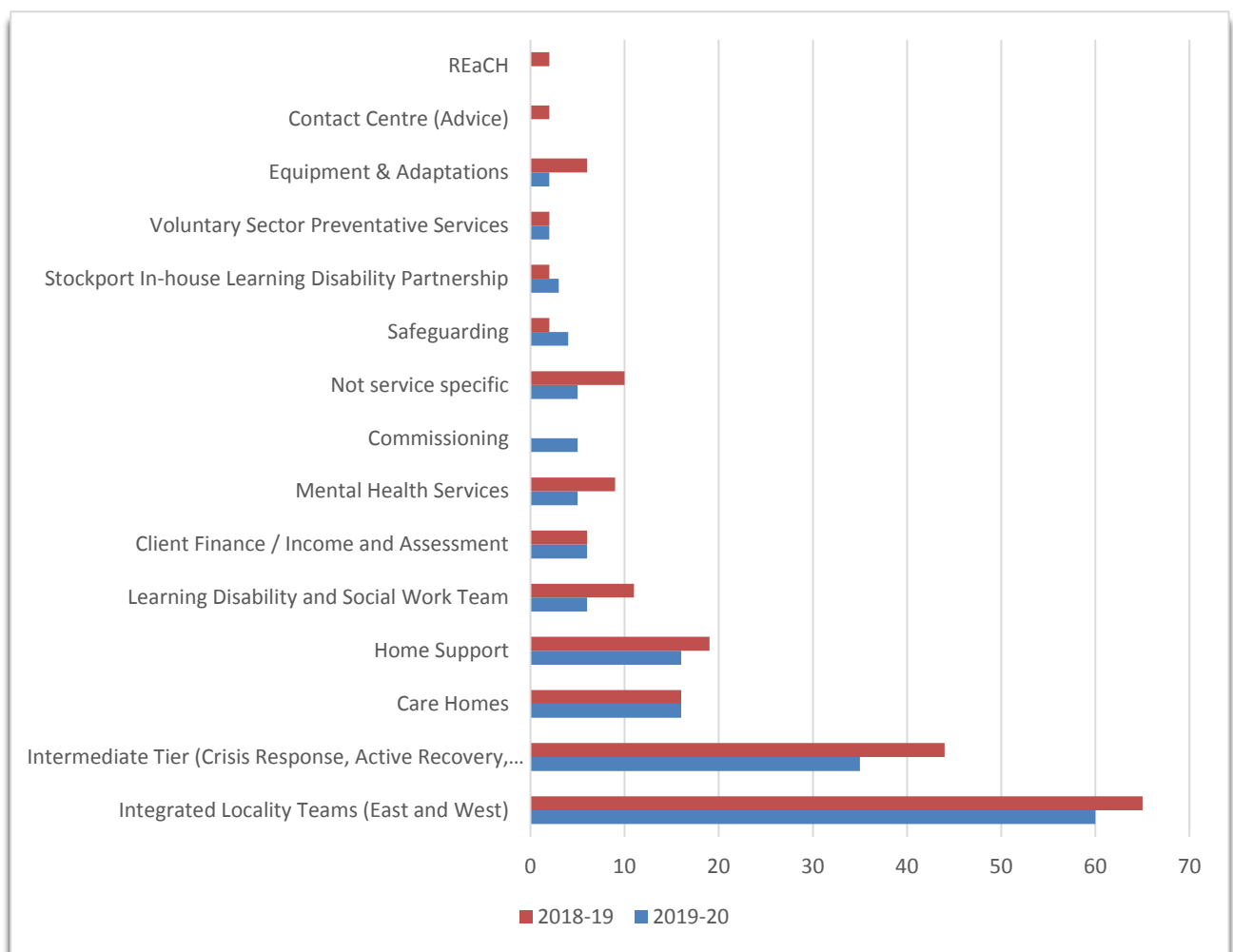
4.1.1 2 Corporate Complaints were raised in 2019-20, compared with 3 in the previous year. The Directorate mainly handles statutory complaints.

4.2 Statutory complaints

4.2.1 A total of 167 Statutory Adult Social Care (ASC) complaints were received in 2019-20, compared with 192 in 2018-19. In particular, there has been a reduction in complaints this year in the following areas:

- Integrated Locality Teams – East and West
- Intermediate Tier
- Mental Health Services
- Home Support

Graph 2 – A comparison of ASC complaints received in 2019-20 with 2018-19



4.3 Services to People (Children’s Services)

4.3.1 33 Corporate Complaints were raised this year, compared with 32 in the previous year. The majority of complaints related to dissatisfaction with social care matters where the conduct of social workers and other professionals was called into question. The majority of such complaints have not been upheld.

4.4 Statutory complaints

4.4.1 There was no significant fluctuation in the number of complaints received in 2019-20 (41), compared with 49 in the previous year.

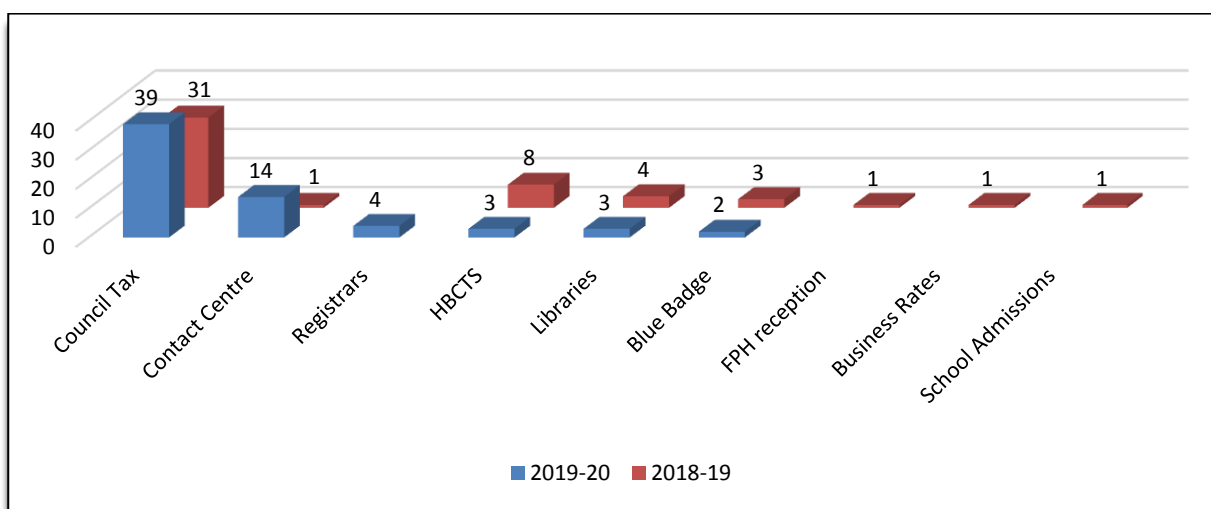
4.5 Corporate and Support Services (CSS)

4.5.1 There was an increase in complaints received this year (65) compared with last year (50). Council Tax complaints rose by 26% compared to last year, and there was a sharp rise in complaints about the Contact Centre, which was linked to an increase in calls relating to revenues and benefits issues (please refer to section 4.5.2 below). Registrars also saw four complaints registered this year (none were upheld).

4.5.2 The increase in complaints in 2019/20 was not attributable to anything in particular, but typical issues that arise each year, such as people being unhappy being asked to pay Council Tax or Business Rates; issues relating to annual bill increases, not being entitled to benefits, or a discount or exemption. However, it was found in the majority of cases that procedures had been correctly applied. Some complaints related to being unable to get through on the telephone to the contact centre to discuss their accounts, and these complaints were upheld or partially upheld.

4.5.3 Where fault was identified affecting a number of people, the council took action to review processes, correct system errors, and provide staff training and updates in the hope of reducing similar complaints from arising again.

Graph 3 – Breakdown of CSS complaints received in 2019-20 and 2018-19:



4.6 Services to Place

4.6.1 The number of complaints received this year (80 complaints) is almost identical to the number received last year (81 complaints). The following services have seen a rise in complaints this year:

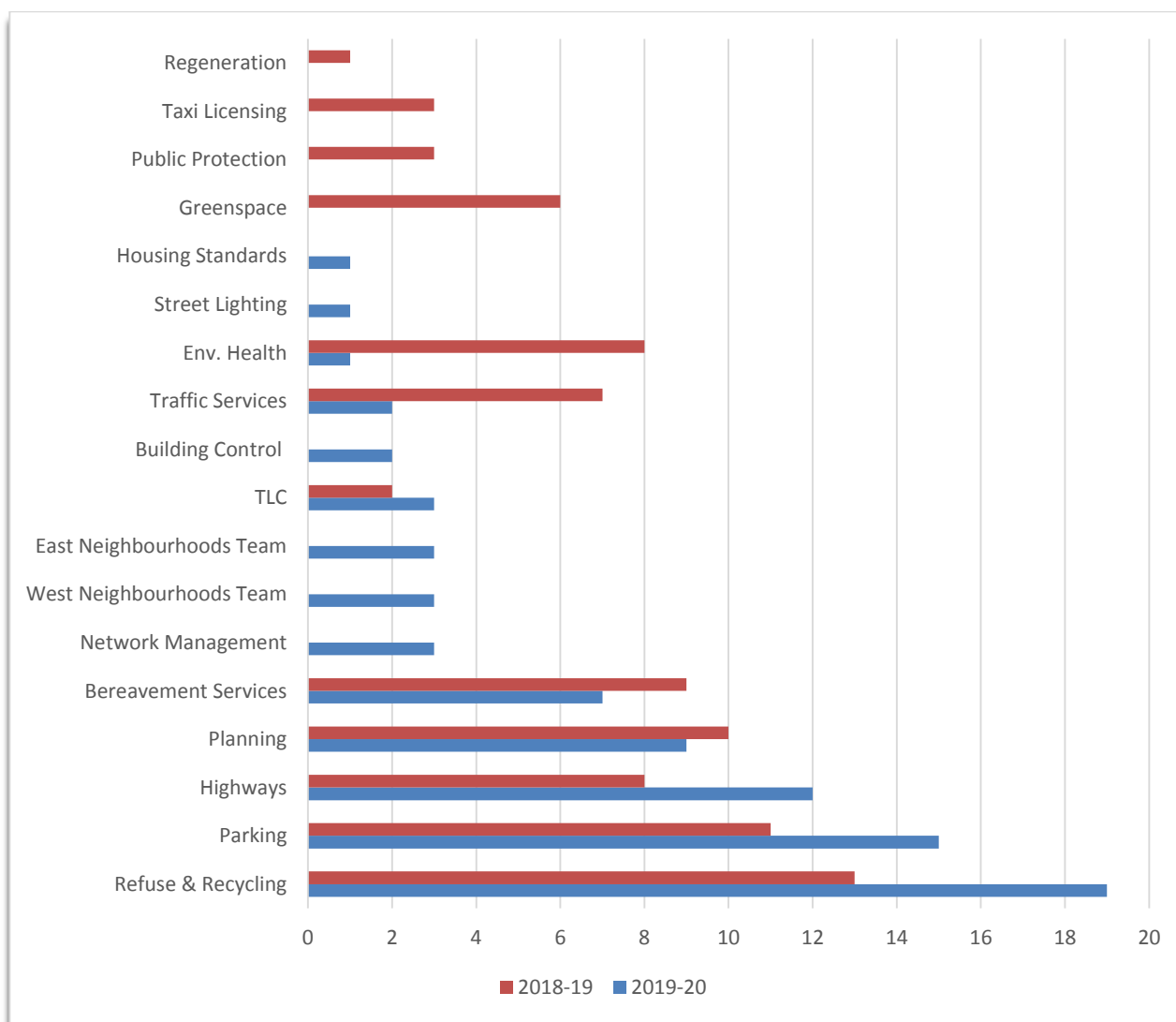
- Refuse and Recycling
- Parking
- Highways

4.6.2 With respect to complaints about Refuse and Recycling, common gripes were about missed bin collections and requests for free replacement of bins where they have either been lost or damaged. In some cases, these have escalated to Stage 1 and Stage 2 as complainants were unhappy about council policy.

4.6.3 A number of complaints were made about the Parking service relating to requests for parking permits, as well as customers bringing into question the conduct of civil enforcement officers. Complaints about the latter are difficult to investigate, as they are often essentially one person's word against another's. However, officers have received training on conflict management and adopting de-escalation techniques. It is hoped that the roll out of body cameras should further reduce confrontations between officers and members of the public when parking tickets are being issued. Any complaints received can also be investigated more thoroughly, as camera footage should be available relating to any incidents that may arise.

4.6.4 Complaints about highways are broad, in that there are a number of services involved. This year, complaints were made about the SEMMS team and the work on the A6MARR scheme. Complaints were also received about the Town Centre Access Plan (TCAP) and delays caused by road works; highways maintenance issues and what the council was doing regarding flooding also gave rise to complaints .

Graph 4 – A comparison of Place complaints received in 2019-20 with 2018-19³:



5.0 OVERVIEW OF STAGE 2 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

5.1 The total of complaints escalating to Stage 2 increased from 75 last year to 102 in 2019-20. Complaints about Place Services increased by 36%, and Corporate and Support Services by 35%. 36% of Stage 2 complaints were either upheld or partially upheld this year, compared with 24% in 2018-19, and 38% in 2017-18.

5.2 Complaints made about the Refuse and Recycling service in 2019/20 doubled (increasing to 20 from 10 in 2018-19). However, these numbers remain low when compared to the numbers of households receiving the service. The majority of these were related to bin replacements where the customer was unhappy with the council policy of customers having to pay for their own bin replacement.

³ Please note that some services such as Environmental Health were amalgamated into the East and West Neighbourhood teams that were established.

- 5.3 Where fault was identified as a result of Stage 2 investigations robust action was taken and this is evidenced by the number of recommendations made in cases this year (51), compared with last year (36). Furthermore, the Corporate Complaints Manager has delivered training to staff from across the council on effective handling of complaints, as well as dealing with vexatious and difficult customers. Additional refresher training has also been delivered on using the case management system to ensure complaints are picked up in a timely manner, thereby reducing some types of complaints.
- 5.4 A review of decisions made in recent years indicates a fluctuation in the percentage of complaints upheld at Stage 2, which seems to mirror what has been occurring at Stage 1. The percentage of complaints upheld by the Ombudsman also seems to oscillate from year to year. It is therefore difficult to draw firm conclusions from the upheld percentage rate per se, as indicated in the table below.

**Table 2:
Percentage of upheld Stage 1, Stage 2 Corporate Complaints
and LGSCO Complaints between 2015-2019**

Year	% Stage 1 complaints upheld	% Stage 2 complaints upheld	% LGSCO complaints upheld
2015-16	28%	29%	40%
2016-17	57%	34%	57%
2017-18	36%	38%	61%
2018-19	28%	24%	45%
2019-20	37%	36%	TBC

6.0 OVERVIEW OF STOCKPORT HOMES COMPLAINTS

- 6.1 In comparison to last year, there has been a significant reduction in the number of complaints closed⁴. This decrease is attributable to the reduction in complaints received for the repairs service⁵, which significantly affects the overall complaint figure⁶. The repairs service has made a number of changes over the last 12-18 months⁷, which have had an impact on service delivery and complaint numbers. Complaints data will continue to be monitored throughout the next financial year to ensure that the trend continues in the longer-term.

7.0 LESSONS LEARNT

The council and Stockport Homes are keen to learn from complaints in order that they can improve their services. The following are examples of lessons learnt in 2019-20.

⁴ 416 complaints closed in 2019/20 compared to 602 closed in 2018/19

⁵ 190 complaints closed for repairs in 2019/20 compared to 333 closed in 2018/19

⁶ 46 per cent of complaints closed in 2019/20 relate to repairs

⁷ These include restructures of the repairs service and the customer feedback team resulting in improved communication, clearer lines of reporting, and earlier identification and resolution of issues

7.1 Services to People (Adult Social Care)

- A complaint was made that a care worker had conducted a home visit unannounced and attended with a trainee and neither were wearing ID badges. The care agency apologised to the client and instructed staff to wear ID badges at all times whilst on duty. The agency also agreed to ensure that staff were aware of the importance of giving advance notice of any change; also of seeking client consent before bringing new people on a visit
- A carer did not use the equipment provided to assist a client to move from their bed to a chair. As well as issuing an apology the care agency agreed to ensure that all staff had up to date moving and handling training and that those staff also carefully read the moving and handling plan before they start moving a client

7.2 Services to People (Children's)

- A complaint highlighted that the Council was not automatically uplifting payment rates for Special Guardians (SG). It has since implemented a new finance programme, which automatically uplifts rates. Furthermore, the Council has committed to reviewing the rates of all SG carers who would likely have been affected and will be contacting them regarding backdated payments based on the foster carer's allowance rate being applied for the relevant period

7.3 Corporate and Support Services

- In 2019-20, the Corporate Complaints Manager worked collaboratively with the Digital by Design team and officers from across the Council, to undertake a review of how customer complaints are submitted on the Council's website. The project team of user experience and content designers, business and system analysts, developers and a officers from number of services, looked at all aspects of the customer journey, viewing it through the eyes of the user, with the aim of improving the customer experience
- As a result, they updated the online information, advice and guidance, to ensure the website guides customers to the most efficient and relevant way of contacting the Council. The web-page now includes simple prompts to separate service requests and comments, from formal complaints. They also re-designed the online complaints form to improve the customer experience when logging cases online. All the new content and form designs were tested with users to ensure they met their needs and improved the customer journey. Changes have also been made to the way formal complaints are handled in Verint - the council's corporate case management system, including improvements to the complaints work queues and how officers are notified when a new case is submitted. It is hoped that this will reduce delays in responding to customers and also help to de-escalate certain enquiries that can turn into formal complaints

- There were two partially upheld complaints in the 3rd quarter about the council's enforcement agent for council tax. The enforcement agent was reminded to ensure they adhere to a strict code of conduct and follow policy and guidelines, which are set down by their governing body. The council reviews complaints made about its enforcement agent to ensure that their actions comply with their policies.

7.4 Services to Place

- A complaint was made that the council had wrongly referred non-payment of a PCN to its enforcement agent. The complainant was insistent he had originally paid the PCN and produced a bank letter showing payment made to the council, although there was no record of a payment showing against the Parking team. The complaint investigation concluded that the payment was very likely to have been made to the council, although issues were experienced in the receipting of income and allocating to the relevant PCN. This can happen when incorrect reference numbers are quoted – a few other instances of this happening were later discovered. On this occasion, the council agreed to refund the complainant the enforcement fees he had paid by way of settlement of the matter. A new payment system has since been implemented, which includes intelligent deciphering technology to reduce processing errors even when correct reference numbers are not quoted by customers.
- A complaint was made that the council had erred in identifying a tree in his garden as being covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), which the complainant wanted to remove. The complaint investigation concluded that information relating to the existing TPO in question was somewhat unclear and the associated plans and maps lacked consistency and clarity. It was accepted that the TPO possibly related to another tree that may previously have been removed as part of development in the area. The council undertook to reviewing and updating its existing TPOs to ensure that they accurately reflect the current tree stock and local geography. The complainant was also offered a payment in recognition for his time and trouble pursuing the complaint.
- A number of residents' complained about the impact of noise caused by works associated with the A6MARR scheme. The complaint investigation found that noise levels following the works were on a par with levels recorded prior to the works. However, the council had mitigated against the noise levels from traffic by laying a special surface on the road. An acoustic fence was also planned to be put up to act as an additional noise-reducing buffer

7.5 Stockport Homes

- A new process has been put in place to ensure that vulnerable tenants are aware of how they can access cooking facilities after cookers are condemned

- Staff have been made aware of how to check the Openview Portal⁸ for job updates and provide additional training if needed. The SLA with Openview has also been reviewed and agreed that operatives will now attend out of hours when there is a report of no TV signal⁹
- Stockport Homes will shortly agree a procurement process with installation contractors, to facilitate quicker inspection of issues when under warranty in order to ensure faster resolution and minimise impact on customers

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 CRMG Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- Review performance information contained in this report, and
- Comment on the performance measures reported and suggest any additional information that might be collected in future.

Background Papers - There are none

Anyone wishing to discuss the report should contact Anwar Majothi on 0161 474 3182, or by email on anwar.majothi@stockport.gov.uk

⁸ A web-based portal hosted by Openview, which allows concierge staff to raise new jobs and check the progress of existing jobs.

⁹ This applies to tower blocks where there is a communal TV aerial, not to issues with aerials in individual properties