



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

**Housing Complaints,
Compliments and Comments
Annual Report
2020/21**

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Introduction

1. This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2020/21 under the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the procedure). The purpose of the report is to identify topics and trends in relation to complaints; identify areas of organisational learning that have taken place over the past year as a result of the complaints received and make further recommendations based on trend data to improve services. The report also highlights any areas of good practice and seeks to identify topics and trends in relation to comments made by members of the public so that the Council can take action where appropriate to improve services.
2. In addition to the statistical information presented in this report it is important to recognise the work of the Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team that underpins this in terms of promoting an organisational culture in which complaints are recognised, accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. This also enables the Council to collect accurate information on complaints in order to identify topics and trends and improve services accordingly.

Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

3. The procedure sets out how the Council will deal with complaints, compliments and comments received about the Council as a social landlord (as well as in respect of its ownership and management of leasehold housing).
4. The procedure has three stages. Stage 1 is a local resolution stage where we try to resolve those complaints that cannot be resolved immediately as part of our day to day business. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with locally, that is within the service being complained about. We aim to resolve the majority of complaints at Stage 1 of the procedure.
5. Stage 2 is a formal investigation stage where complaints will usually be investigated by the Complaints Investigator or Complaints Manager.
6. Stage 3 is a mandatory stage between the Council and the Housing Ombudsman. This is referred to as the 'designated person' or 'democratic filter'. The designated person or democratic filter can be an MP, a local Councillor or a recognised Tenant Panel. In Darlington we do not currently have a recognised Tenant Panel (from here onwards referred to as the Tenants' Complaints Panel).
7. Should a tenant remain dissatisfied with the Council's response to their complaint, they will be required to refer the matter to the 'designated person' or 'democratic filter'. The 'designated person' or 'democratic filter' may help resolve the complaint directly, refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman or decide to do neither. If the 'designated person' or 'democratic filter' decides not to take any action the complainant will be entitled to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman

directly. The complainant will also be able to approach the Housing Ombudsman directly in cases where eight weeks have elapsed since the Council's response to their complaint at Stage 2 of the procedure.

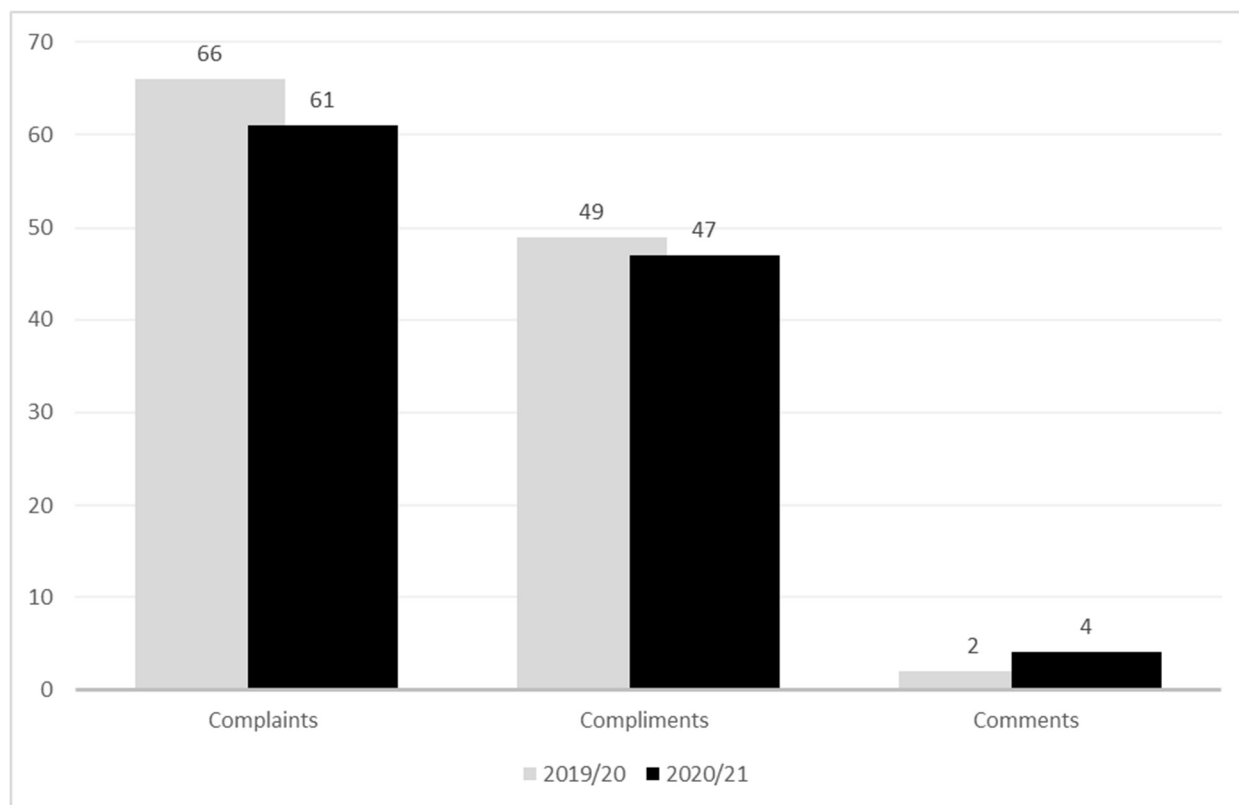
Public Information and Accessibility

8. We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible we have produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.
9. Information is available on the Council's website which contains an electronic form people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
10. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Complaints Information and Organisational Learning

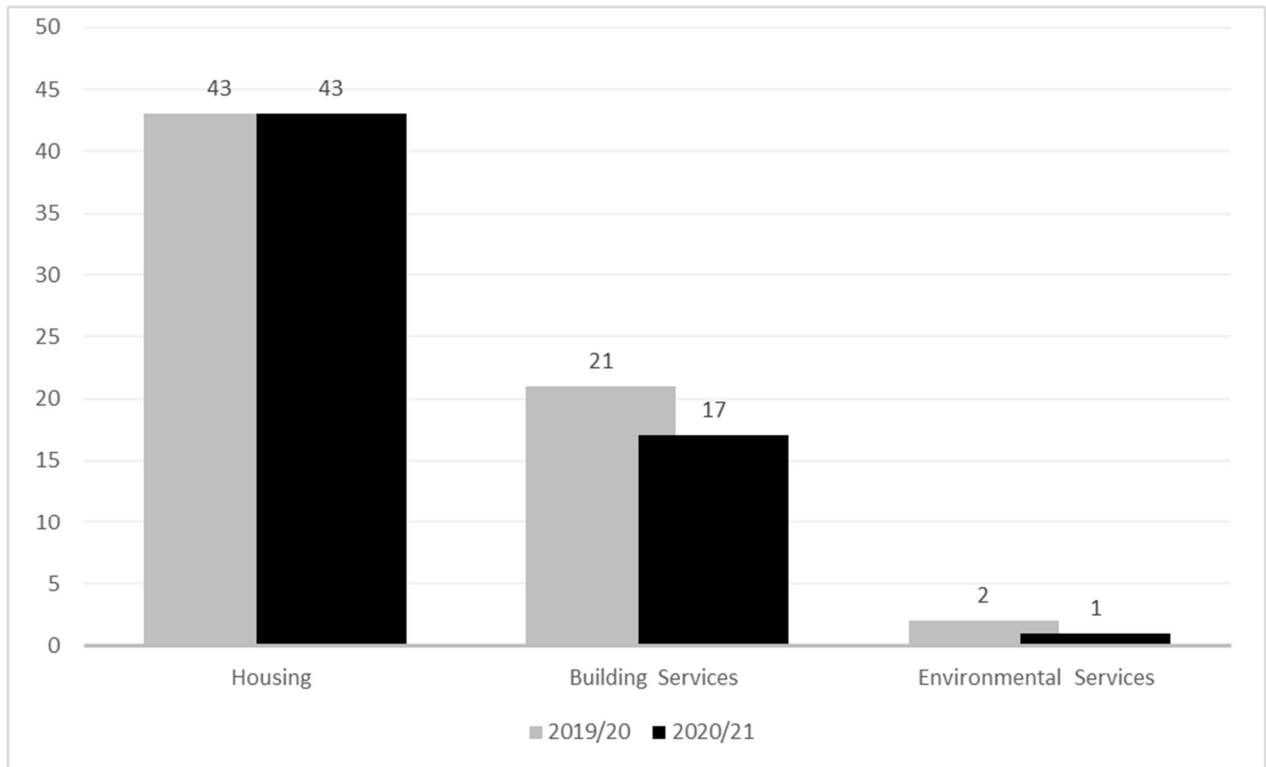
Overview of Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments



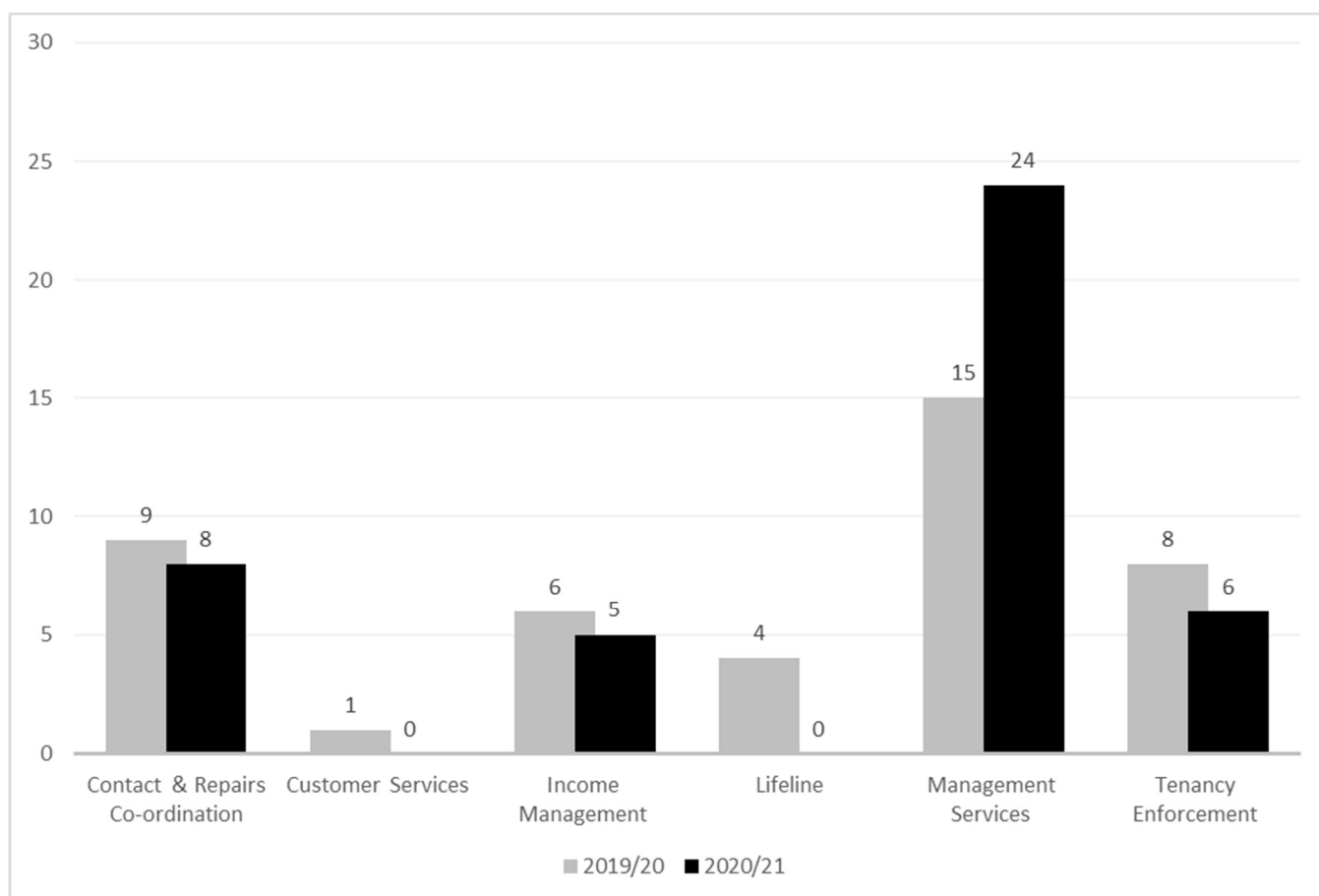
11. Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 the Council received a total of 61 complaints under the procedure, a decrease from 66 in 2019/20. A total of 13 complaints were considered at Stage 2, an increase from seven in 2019/20. 12 of the Stage 2 complaints were initially dealt with at Stage 1, while one was escalated directly to Stage 2. No complaints were considered at Stage 3, as was the case in 2019/20.
12. The Council received 47 compliments under the procedure, a decrease from 49 in 2019/20.
13. The Council also receive 4 comments, an increase from two in 2019/20.

Complaints by Service



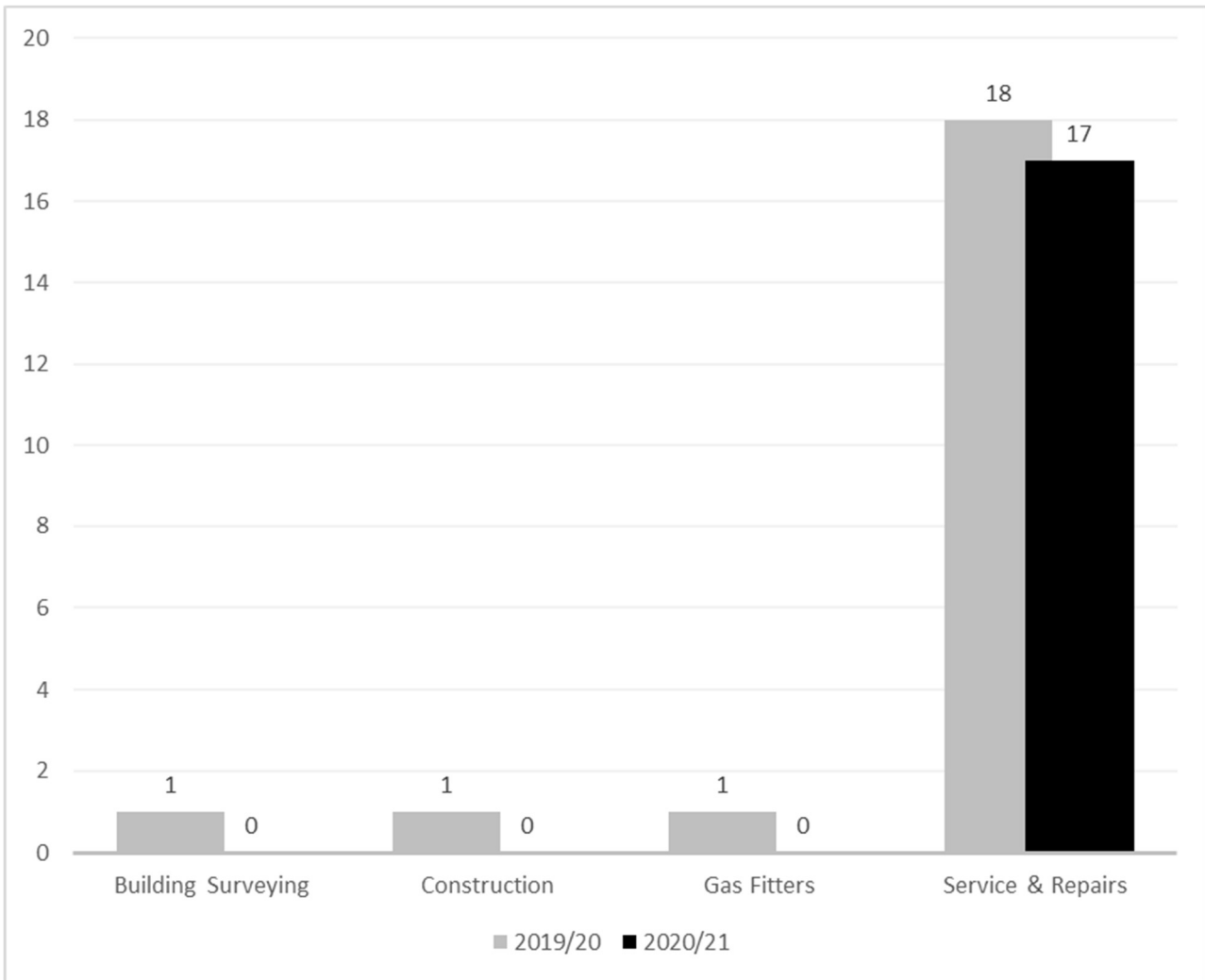
- 14. Housing received 43 complaints, as was the case in 2019/20.
- 15. Building Services received 17 complaints, a decrease from 21 in 2019/20.
- 16. Environmental Services received one complaint, a decrease from two in 2019/20.

Complaints by Team – Housing Service



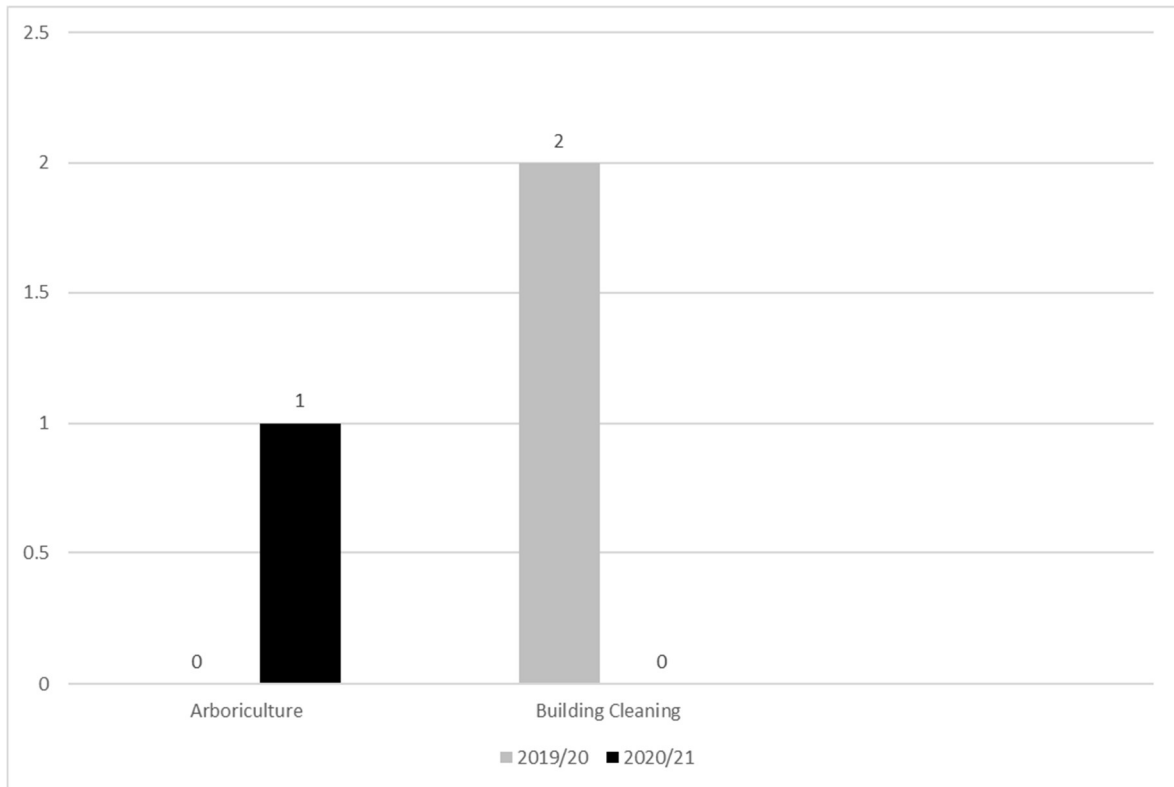
17. Contact & Repairs Co-ordination received eight complaints, compared to nine in 2019/20. Complaints concerned communication, appointments not being kept and delays in undertaking repairs.
18. Customer Services received zero complaints, a decrease from one in 2019/20.
19. Housing Income Management received five complaints, a decrease from six in 2019/20. There were no identifiable themes in the complaints received.
20. Lifeline received zero complaints, a decrease from four 2019/20.
21. Management Services received 24 complaints, an increase from 15 in 2019/20. There is no particular theme that would account for the increase. Complaints concerned communication and the service provided in relation to various housing management issues.
22. Tenancy Enforcement received six complaints, a decrease from eight in 2019/20. Complaints concerned the service provided in relation to dealing with neighbour nuisances.

Complaints by Team – Building Services



- 23. Building Surveying received zero complaints, a decrease from one in 2019/20.
- 24. Construction received zero complaints, a decrease from one in 2019/20.
- 25. Gas Fitters received zero complaints, a decrease from one in 2019/20.
- 26. Service & Repairs received 17 complaints, a decrease from 18 in 2019/20. Complaints concerned the time taken to complete and the quality of repairs.

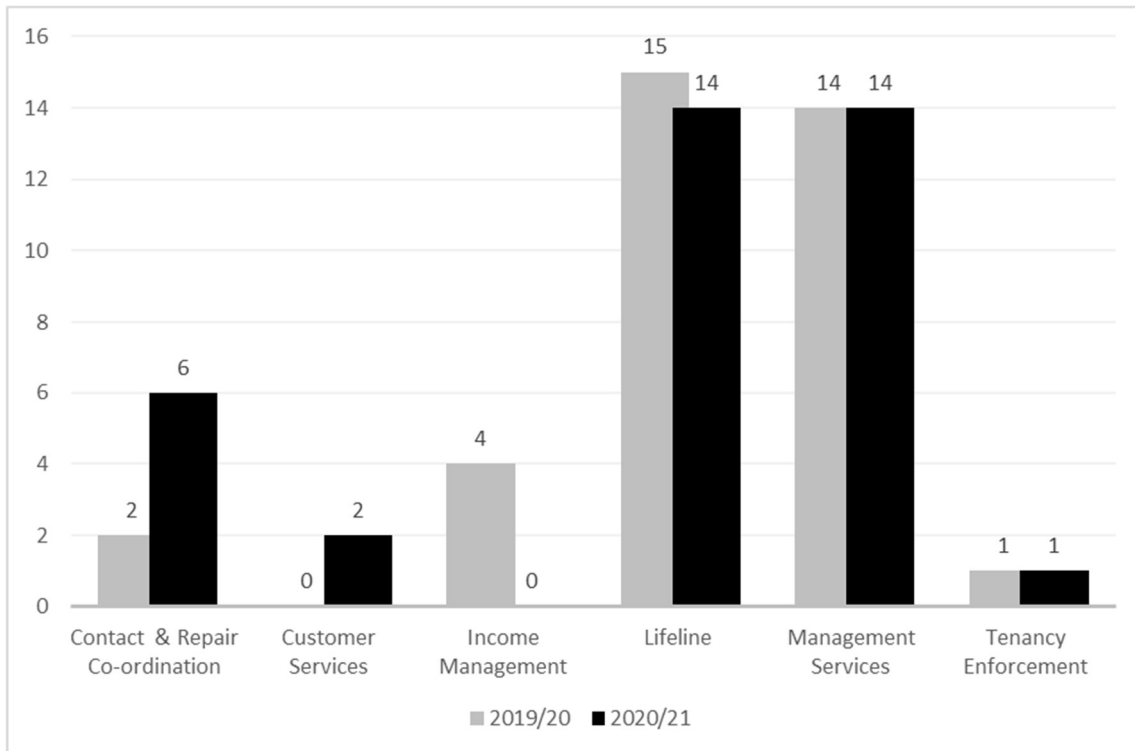
Complaints by Team - Environmental Services



27. Arboriculture received one complaint, an increase from zero in 2019/20.

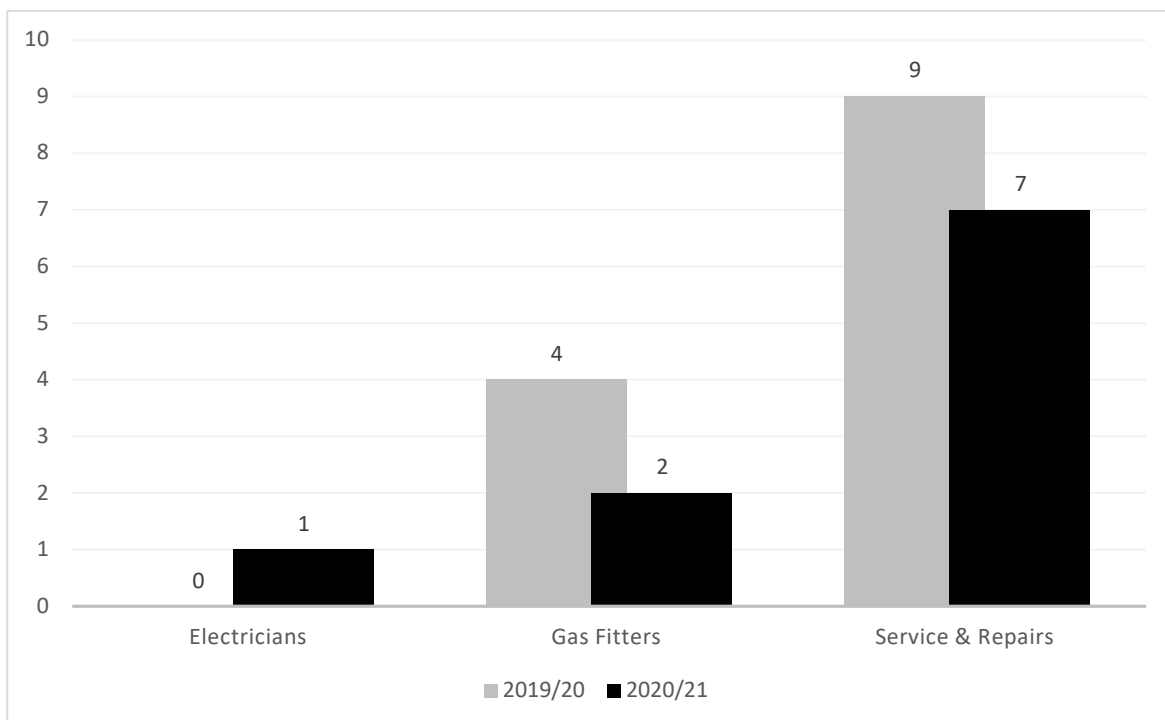
28. Building Cleaning received zero complaints, a decrease from two in 2019/20.

Compliments by Team – Housing Services



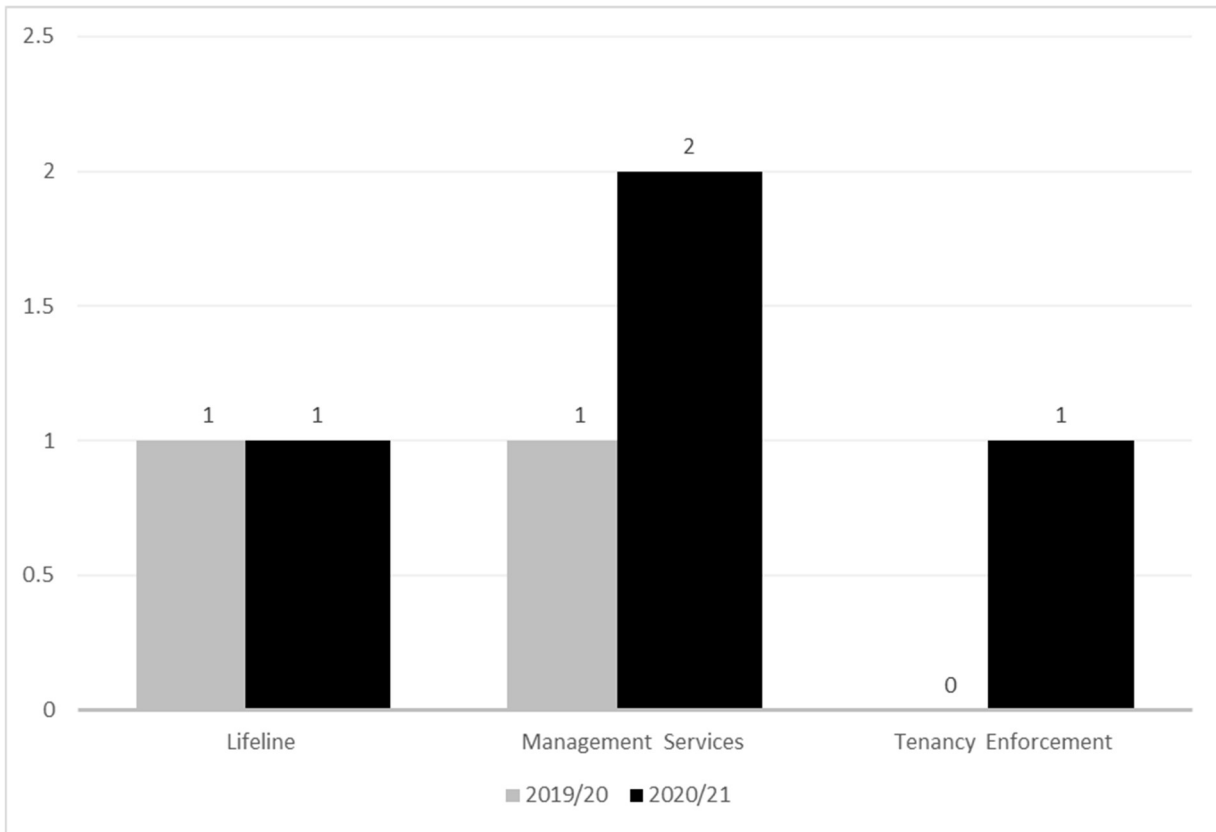
29. Housing received 37 compliments, an increase from 36 in 2019/20.

Compliments by Team – Building Services



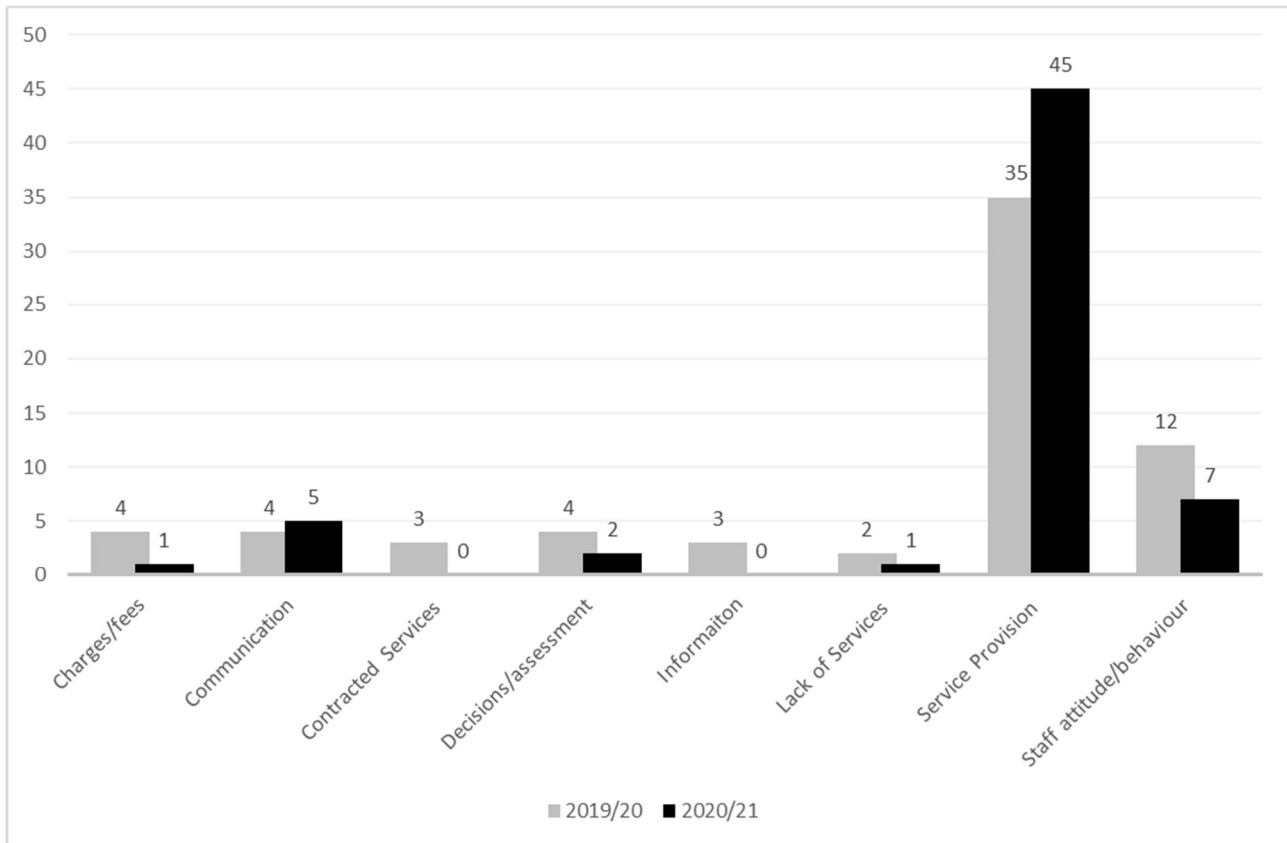
30. Building Services received 10 compliments, a decrease from 13 in 2019/20.

Comments by Team - Housing



31. The Council received four comments during 2020/21, an increase from two in 2019/20.

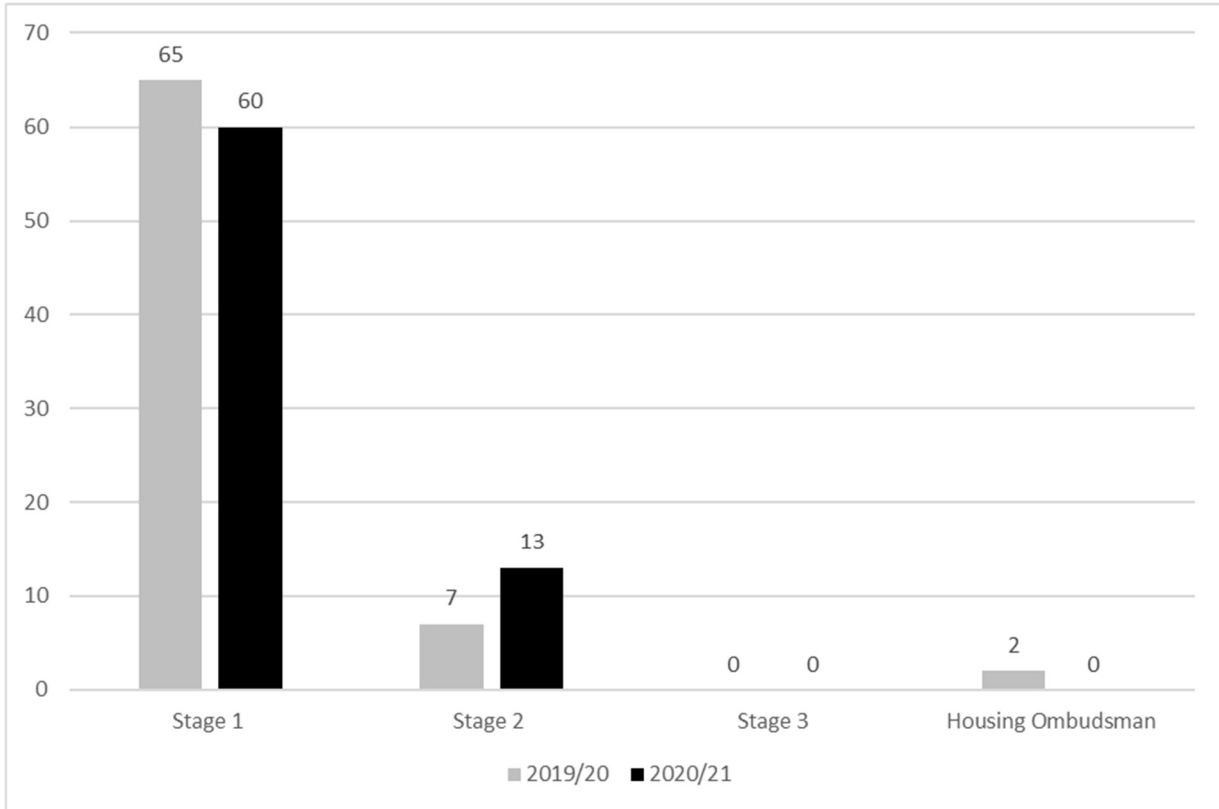
Complaints by Issue



- 32. One complaint concerned charges/fees, a decrease from four in 2019/20.
- 33. Five complaints related to communication, an increase from four in 2019/20.
- 34. Zero complaints concerned contracted services, a decrease from three in 2019/20.
- 35. Two complaints related to decisions/assessment, a decrease from four 2019/20.
- 36. Zero complaints related to information, a decrease from three in 2019/20.
- 37. One complaint was about a lack of services, a decrease from two in 2019/20.
- 38. 45 complaints related to service provision, an increase from 35 in 2019/20.
- 39. Seven complaints related to staff attitude/behaviour, a decrease from 12 in 2019/20.

Complaints by Stage

40. The below graph shows the number of complaints received at each stage of the procedure during 2020/21.



- 41. The Council received 60 Stage 1 complaints, a reduction from 65 in 2019/20.
- 42. 12 were escalated to Stage 2, and one was investigated directly at Stage 2. A total of 13 complaints were considered at Stage 2, an increase from 7 in 2019/20.
- 43. Zero complaints were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman, a decrease from two in 2019/20.

Complaints Outcomes

44. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2020/21.

Stage 1

| Service Area/Team | Inconclusive | Not Upheld | Partially Upheld | Upheld | Withdrawn | Total |
|---|--------------|------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Housing | | | | | | |
| Customer Services | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Income Management | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| Management Services | 0 | 12 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 22 |
| Tenancy Enforcement | 0 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 9 |
| Contact & Repairs Co-ordination | 1 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 7 |
| Total for Housing | 1 | 19 | 6 | 9 | 9 | 44 |
| Building Services | | | | | | |
| Service & Repairs | 2 | 4 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 16 |
| Total for Building Services | 2 | 4 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 16 |
| Environmental Services | | | | | | |
| Arboriculture | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total for Environmental Services | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Totals | 4 | 23 | 6 | 19 | 9 | 61 |

Stage 2

| Service Area/Team | Inconclusive | Not Upheld | Partially Upheld | Upheld | Withdrawn | Total |
|---|--------------|------------|------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Housing | | | | | | |
| Management Services | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| Tenancy Enforcement | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total for Housing | 0 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| Building Services | | | | | | |
| Service & Repairs | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total for Building Services | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Environmental Services | | | | | | |
| Arboriculture | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total for Environmental Services | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Totals | 1 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 9 |

Stage 3

45. The 'designated person' or 'democratic filter' did not determine any complaints during 2020/21.

Housing Ombudsman

46. The Housing Ombudsman determined one complaint during 2020/21, as was the case in 2019/20.

47. Full details of those complaints determined by the Housing Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 8 December 2020 and 7 September 2021 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).

Organisational Learning

48. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, several service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2020/21 and are detailed below:

Management Services

49. Following a complaint for Management Services it was recommended Housing Services should ensure Housing Officers and Customer Services staff are aware of who can apply for the County Durham & Darlington Community Safety Fund to avoid inaccurate advice being given the future. It was also recommended that Housing Services ensures it adheres to the timescales set out in its Housing Services Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and that officers should be reminded of the importance of consulting residents before making changes to communal areas of the buildings in which they live.
50. Following a further complaint for Management Services it was agreed the Housing Services I would review their sign up process and going forward ensure sign up appointments are made when all works are completed, post inspected and not beforehand. Staff training was to be arranged in relation to the new process and the Council improved its welcome letter for new tenants to advise of any debts associated on the meters for the property. Housing Services also reviewed the empty home cleaning standard with their cleaning contractor.

Service & Repairs

51. Following a complaint for Service & Repairs an officer received refresher guidance on behaviour and the standards we expect all our operatives to adhere to.
52. Following another complaint for Service & Repairs, Building Services decided to keep a small stock of radiators to prevent other people experience delays in having them repaired/replaced.

Contact & Repairs Co-ordination

53. Following a complaint for Contact & Repairs Co-ordination staff were reminded that they should always have a prearranged time to visit. This complaint also led Building Services to review their stock level resulting in them requiring their supplier to hold a small number of a particular boiler part.
54. Following a further complaint for Contact & Repairs Co-ordination, Housing Services reviewed their process for having to re-arrange appointments when unforeseen circumstances occur.

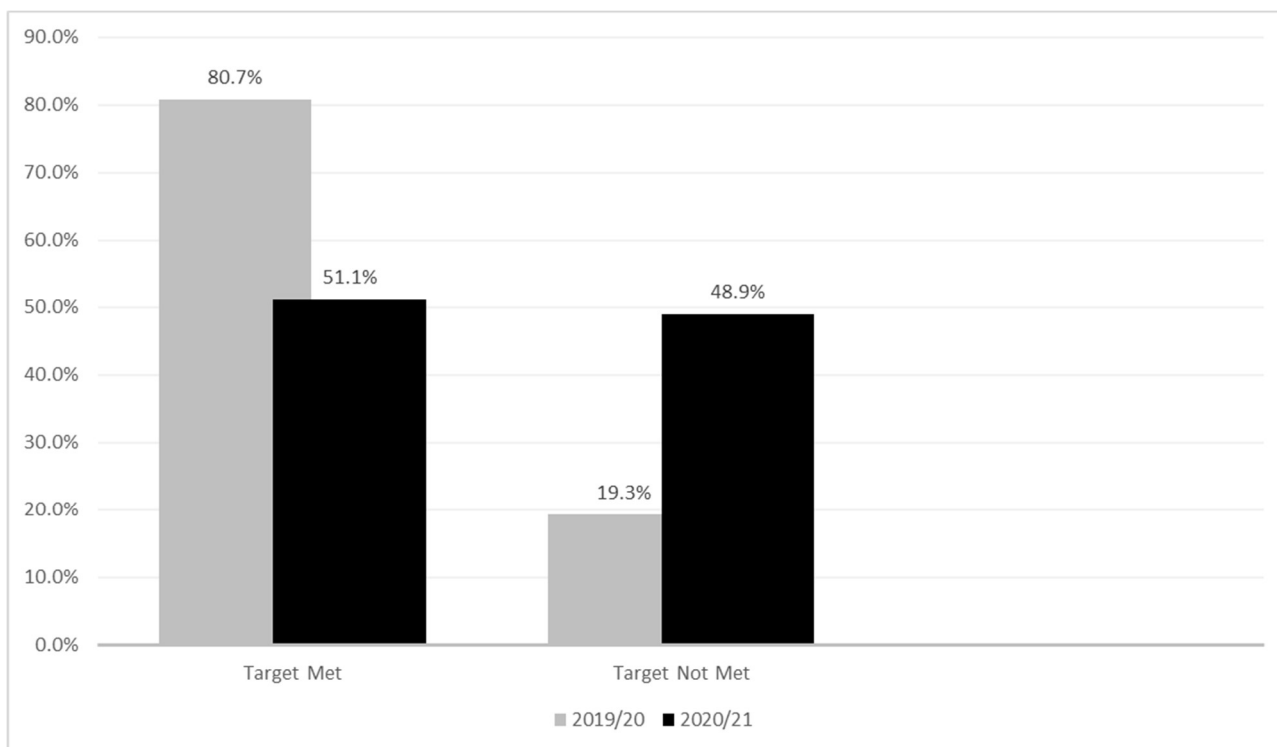
Performance against the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

- 55. The Assistant Director Law and Governance made a [Delegated Decision](#) on 23 March 2020 that gave approval for timescales not to be adhered to as a result of services diverting resources to the areas of greatest need.
- 56. On the 1 January 2021 the Council updated its Housing Complaints procedure to ensure it was compliant with the [Housing Ombudsman Code](#). This included amending the Stage 1 and Stage 2 timescales.

Stage 1

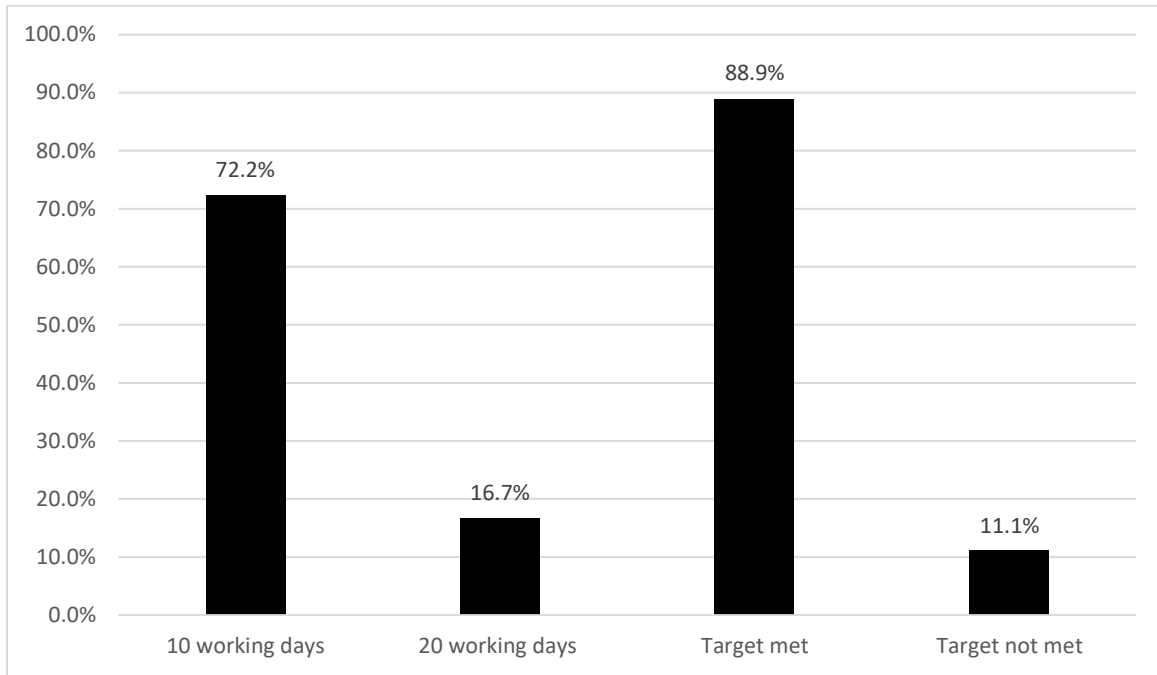
- 57. The below graph shows Stage 1 performance in relation to those complaints received before 1 January 2021.

Performance against Stage 1 response target (25 working days)



- 58. This was a decrease in performance against the Stage 1 response target from 80.7% in 2019/20.
- 59. The below graph shows Stage 1 performance in relation to those complaints received after 1 January 2021.

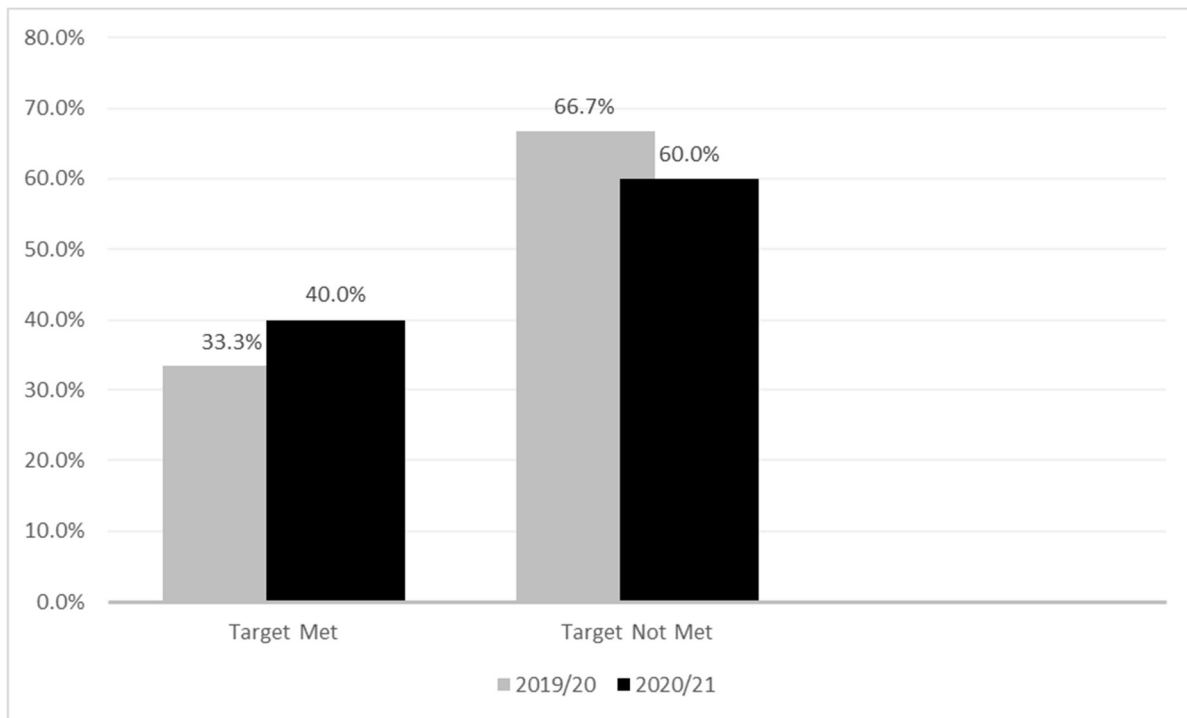
**Performance against Stage 1 response target
(10 working days, with an extension up to 20 working days)**



Stage 2

60. The below graphs shows Stage 2 performance in relation to those complaints received before 1 January 2021.

Performance against Stage 2 response target (30 working days)



- 61. This was an increase in performance against the Stage 2 response target from 33.3% in 2019/20.
- 62. The below graph shows Stage 2 performance in relation to those complaints received after 1 January 2021.

**Performance against Stage 2 response target
(20 working days, with an extension up to 30 working days)**

