

ITEM No ...3.....

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 8 DECEMBER 2021
REPORT ON: BI-ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS
REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
REPORT NO: 300-2021

1. PURPOSE

To report on performance regarding complaints in the first half of 2021/2022, with comparisons to previous periods, and to show how the Council continues to learn from complaints.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee notes:

- (i) the key performance indicators on complaints closed between 1 April 2021 and 30 September 2021, with trends from previous periods;
- (ii) examples of the volume of transactions the Council has with customers and citizens as a context for the number of complaints;
- (iii) examples of how complaints have been used to improve services;
- (iv) results of the satisfaction survey sent to people who made complaints in the first half of 2021/2022;
- (v) examples of compliments received about Council services;
- (vi) a summary of complaints about the Council received by and determined by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman during 2020/2021;
- (vii) work which has been done during 2021 to raise awareness of good complaints handling among staff and ensure equal access to the complaints process for all.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The model Complaints Handling Procedure for Local Authorities requires that regular reports are produced for elected members. This report covers complaints closed between 1 April and 30 September 2021.
- 4.2 In terms of performance management, the report includes data on key complaint handling indicators (Appendix One) and results from the satisfaction surveys sent to those who had complaints closed in the period (Appendix Four). The report also gives examples of how we have used complaints to improve processes (Appendix Three), another requirement of the model procedure.
- 4.3 Appendix Two includes infographics giving examples of the range and number of transactions the Council has with customers and citizens, providing a context for the number of complaints received.
- 4.4 Appendix Five gives examples of compliments received about Council services.

- 4.5 In line with changes made by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to the model Complaints Handling Procedure, the report also includes updates on work which has been done to raise awareness of good complaints handling among staff and ensure equal access to the complaints process for all.

5. OVERVIEW OF PERFORMANCE

- 5.1 Detailed information is included in the Appendices. Key issues to highlight include:
- The number of complaints recorded in the first half of 2021/2022 returned to a more normal level (358 - compared to 210 in the first half of 2020/2021 which coincided with the early period of coronavirus restrictions; a better benchmark is the figure of 296 in the first half of 2019/2020).
 - Performance in terms of the % of complaints closed within the target time improved in the first half of 2021/2022 compared to 2020/2021. For stage 1, the % meeting the 5 day target was 73.0% compared to 66.9%, while for stage 2 the % meeting the 20 day target was 71.0% compared to 59.4%.
 - The % of complaints fully upheld at both stages (23.5% at stage 1 and 15.9% at stage 2) was higher than the 2020/2021 figures (19.1% at stage 1 and 3.1% at stage 2).
 - Failure to provide a service (which on detailed analysis often turns out to be a delay in providing a service, rather than not providing it at all) has remained the most common reason for complaint.
 - The satisfaction surveys sent to those who have made complaints were changed from the start of 2021/2022 as the Council adopted a new standard questionnaire agreed by the Scottish Local Authorities Complaint Handlers Network. This means that trends from previous years are not comparable although trend information based on the new questions will build up over time. Using the standard Scotland-wide survey will also allow benchmarking in future with other local authorities.
- 5.2 All of the issues raised by this report will continue to be discussed at Council Management Team, the Complaints Review Group and within individual services. The examples given in Appendix Three demonstrate the Council's commitment to learn from complaints and improve processes to prevent the same issues recurring, in addition to those complaints which lead to managers speaking to individual employees or arranging training for teams.

6. STATISTICS FROM THE SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICE OMBUDSMAN

- 6.1 22 complaints were received by the Ombudsman about Dundee City Council in 2020/2021 representing 2.3% of those received by the Ombudsman about all local authorities in the year, compared to the previous year's figure of 1.8%.
- 6.2 19 complaints about the Council were determined by the Ombudsman during 2020/2021, compared to 26 in 2019/2020. Of these 19 cases:
- 7 were about Housing
 - 4 were about Roads and Transportation
 - 3 were about Social Work
 - 3 were about Environmental Health and Cleansing
 - 2 were about Planning

6.3 The 19 cases were determined as follows:

- 7 were recorded as 'advice given'
- 11 were 'early resolution' (eg where the Ombudsman found the complaint had already been handled well or there would be insufficient benefit from further investigation)
- 1 was 'investigation'

6.4 Only one complaint reached the 'investigation' stage in 2020/2021 (compared to two in each of 2018/2019 and 2019/2020). This complaint concerned the Council's actions in response to a child protection concern. It was upheld and a number of recommendations were made, all of which have been implemented. Actions requested by the Ombudsman have been implemented.

7. CHANGES TO THE MODEL COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

7.1 This report reflects changes made to the model Complaints Handling Procedure for Local Authorities from 1 April 2021, including the indicators on which we are required to report performance to members.

7.2 As well as the information on performance, learning from complaints and customer satisfaction covered in this report, the revised model procedure requires that we also provide information on steps taken to raise awareness of the complaints handling procedure among staff and on action to ensure equal access to the complaints process for all, including vulnerable and under-represented groups. Initiatives taken in these areas over the past year include:

- **Staff awareness** - During the past year, information on changes to the model Complaints Handling Procedure has been sent to all officers involved in dealing with complaints, and all the procedures and guidance notes on One Dundee were updated and publicised. Face-to-face training has been paused during the pandemic, but the materials used previously in these interactive sessions are being adapted into sessions which can be delivered online. In addition, agreement has been reached with the trade unions on a procedure to support employees who are complained about, including giving them access to information and support if required.
- **Equal access to our complaints process** - The City Council is committed to ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to access our complaints process. In response to evidence nationally that some individuals and groups in society do not use complaints processes to the same extent as others, members previously approved a policy statement aimed to take into account equality and diversity considerations when dealing with complaints, ensure that our complaints process is accessible in a number of ways to suit different people and situations, be responsible and flexible and how we engage with people about complaints, make any reasonable adjustments which are required to overcome any barriers to complaining, and be mindful of any vulnerabilities affecting those making complaints. Officers are planning to write to a wide range of support groups and third sector organisations which are involved in equality issues or which represent people with types of vulnerabilities mentioned in the policy statement, attaching the policy statement and asking them to promote our complaints process and tell us how we could improve it to ensure it is accessible to all, and welcoming their involvement in supporting and advocating on behalf of anyone who has a complaint.

7.3 In July and August 2021, the Council was audited by KPMG on behalf of internal audit on its compliance with the revised model procedure. The findings were reported to Scrutiny Committee in September and all the recommendations are being implemented.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 This report has been subject to an assessment of any impacts on equality and diversity, fairness and poverty, environment and corporate risk. There are no major issues.

- 8.2 The complaints recording database includes a feature that asks those dealing with complaints to note whether any complaints relate to an equalities issue - age, disability, gender, LGBT, race or religion. During the first half of 2021/2022, there were 3 such complaints recorded, two relating to disability and one relating to religion. These complaints have been drawn to the attention of the lead officer with responsibility for equality and diversity and he has no concerns about how they were dealt with.

9. CONSULTATIONS

The Council Management Team was consulted in the preparation of this report.

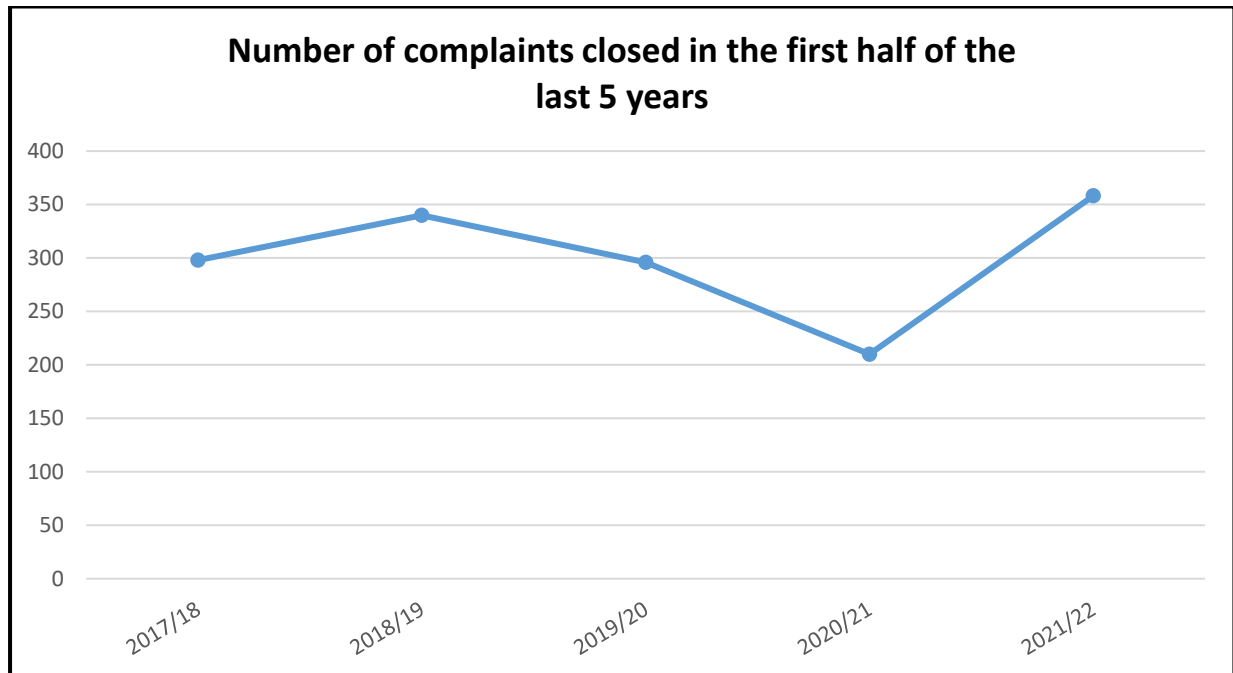
10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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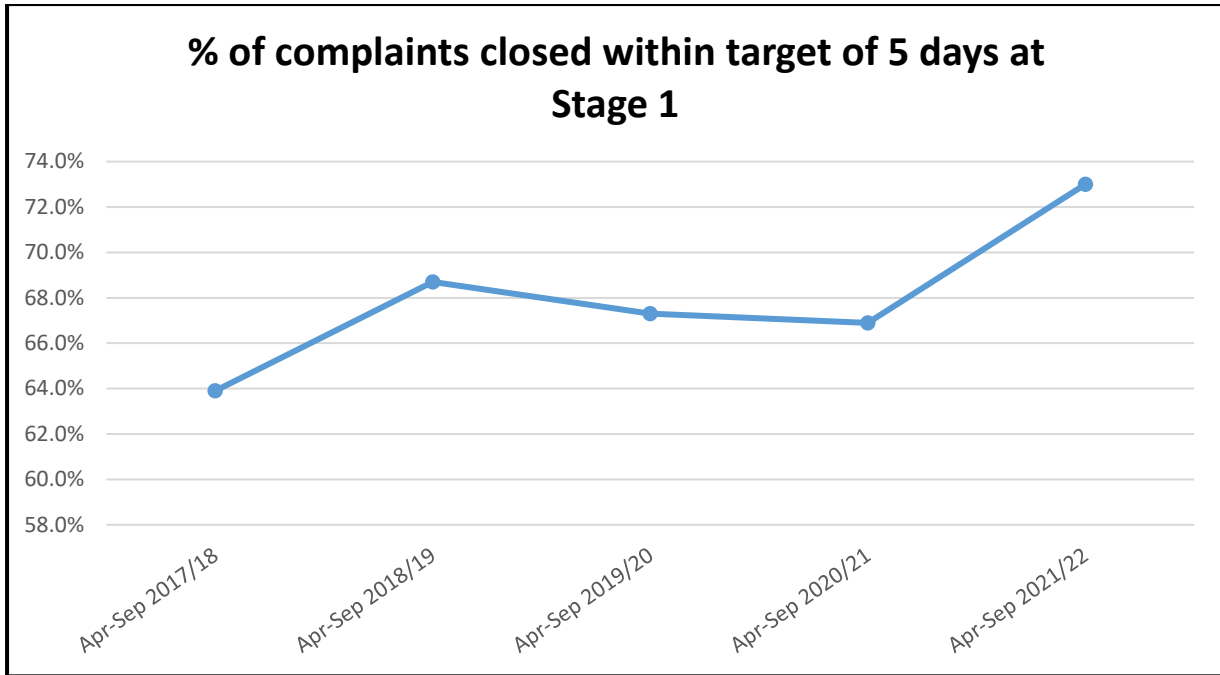
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KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS



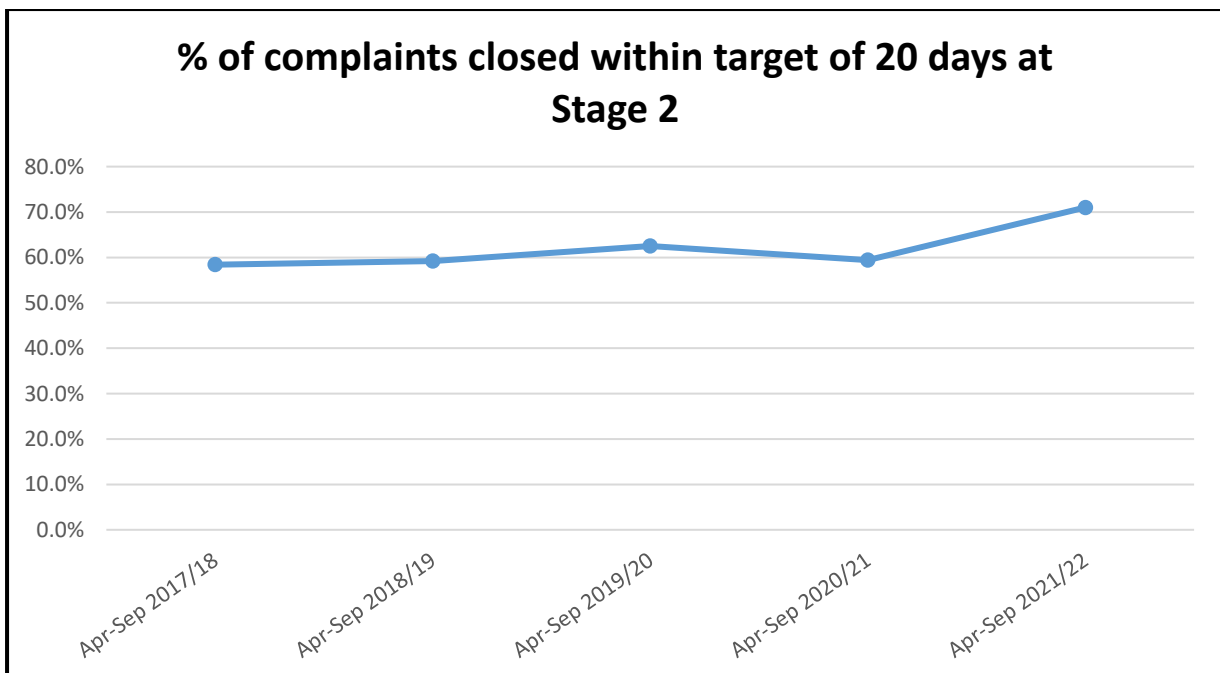
BREAKDOWN BY SERVICE

Service	Apr-Sep 2017/2018	Apr-Sep 2018/2019	Apr-Sep 2019/2020	Apr-Sep 2020/2021	Apr-Sep 2021/2022
Corporate Services	43	51	35	36	44
Children and Families					
- Education	44	47	47	7	29
- Children's Services	10	21	22	19	22
- Criminal Justice	2	1	5	0	2
Neighbourhood Services					
- Housing and Communities	64	93	78	49	82
- Environment	95	79	58	61	107
- Community Safety and Protection	N/A	N/A	7	12	17
City Development	18	29	19	15	25
Chief Executive's	1	4	2	1	1
Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership: Social Work	20	15	23	10	29



A further 11.8% of complaints were dealt with within an extended target time.

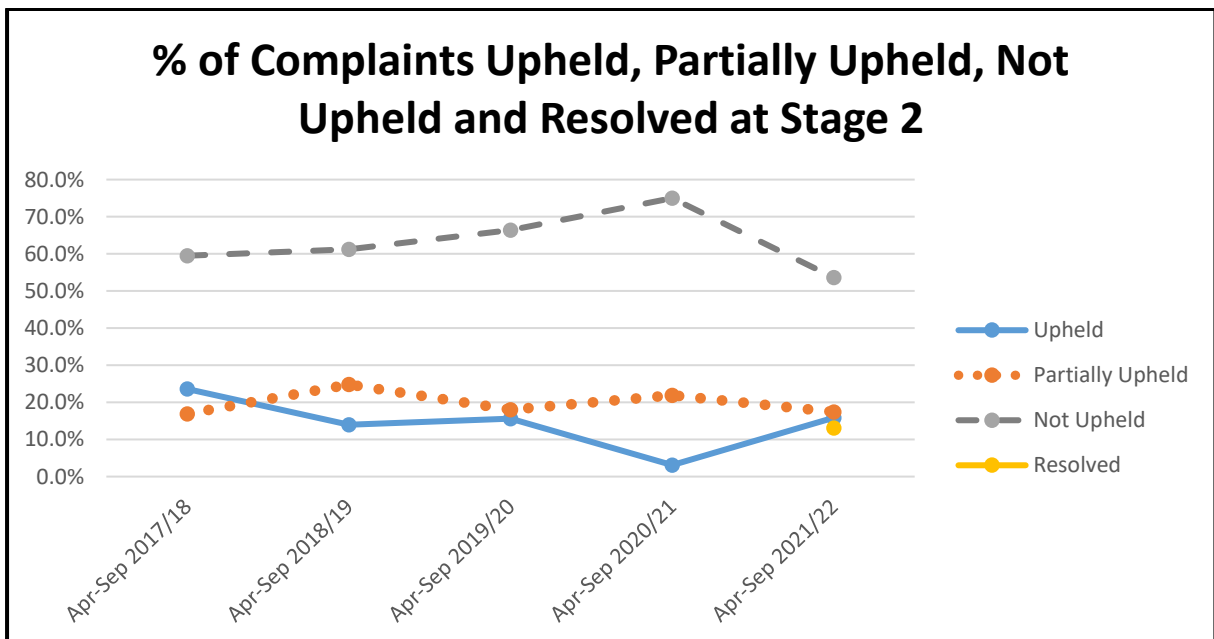
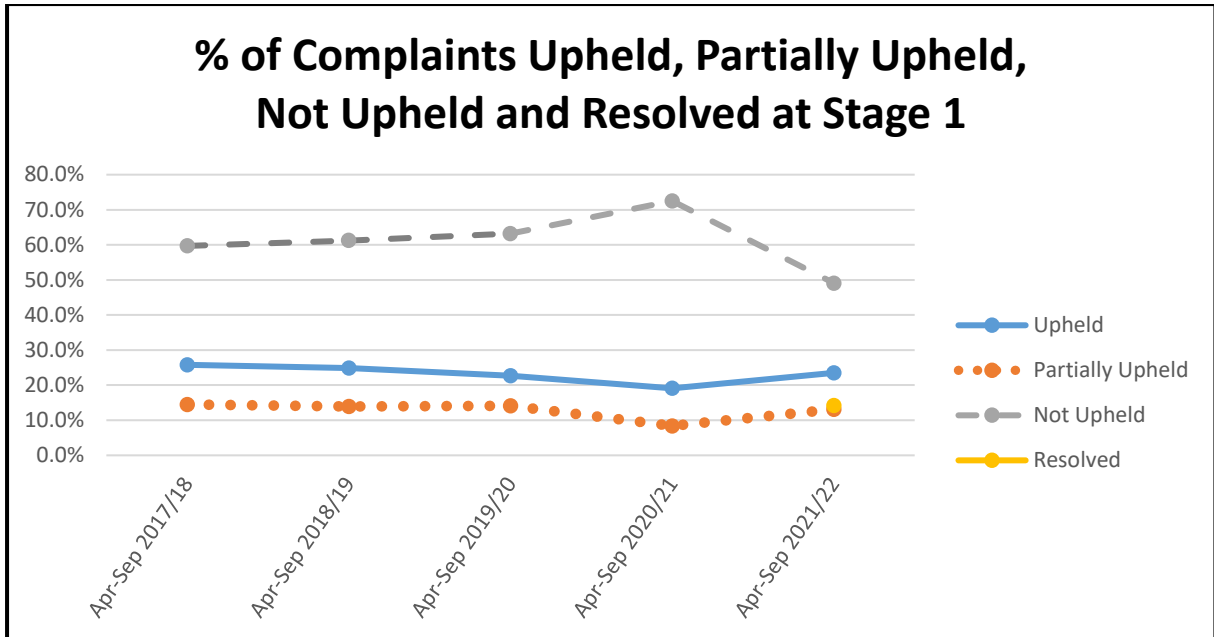
The average number of days taken to close complaints at stage 1 in the first half of 2021/2022 was 5.5, compared with 6.1 in 2020/2021, 4.5 in 2019/2020, 5.2 in 2018/2019 and 8.0 in 2017/2018.



A further 21.7% of complaints were dealt with within an extended target time.

The average number of days taken to close complaints at stage 2 in the first half of 2021/2022 was 25.6, compared with 30.9 in 2020/2021, 23.0 in 2019/2020, 19.3 in 2018/2019 and 24.5 in 2017/2018.

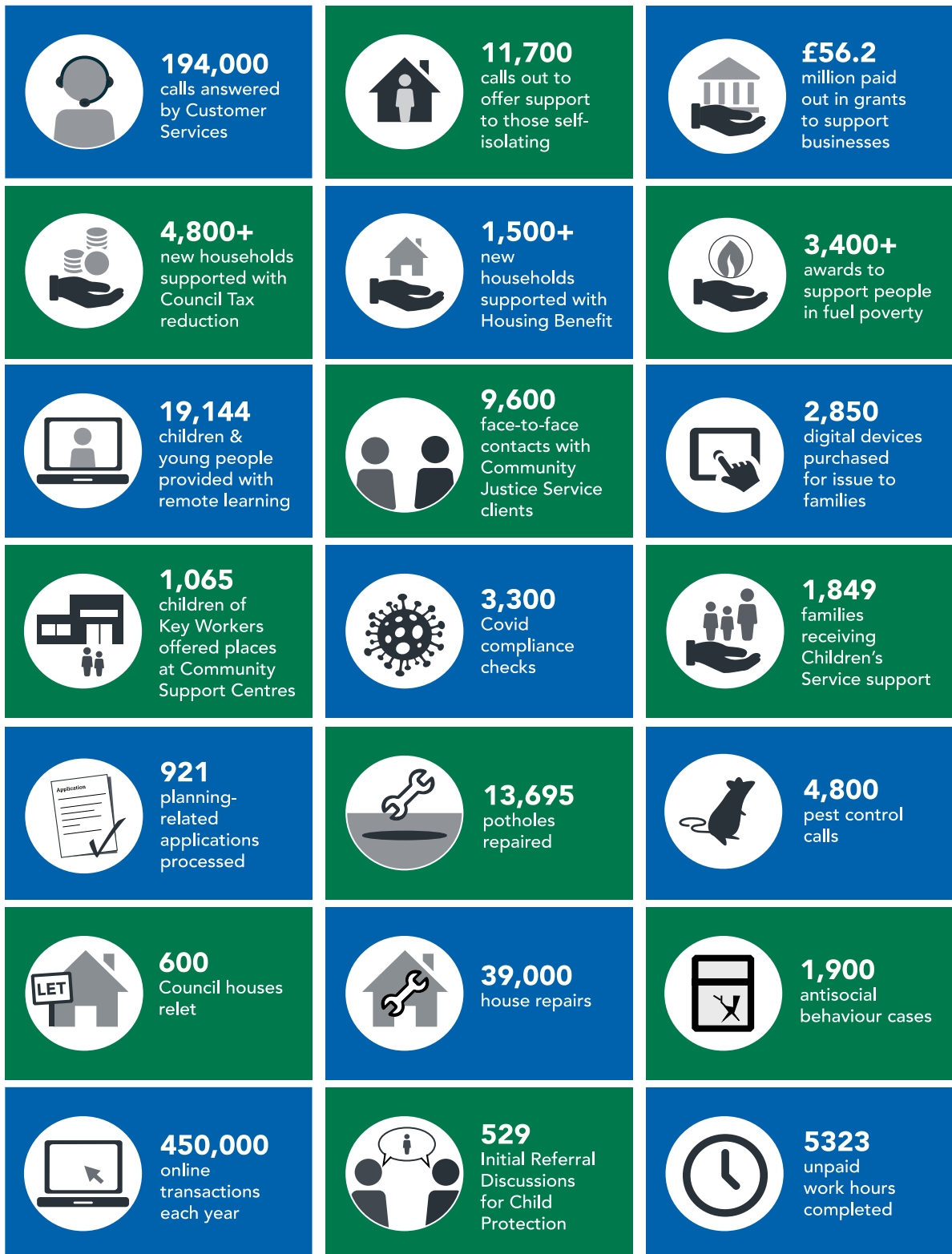
NOTE: Both the 5 day and 20 day targets are designed to drive improvement in prompt responses to complaints, rather than absolute standards that every case is expected to meet.



NOTE: A new option to categorise complaints as 'resolved' was only introduced from 1 April 2021 so there is no trend data on that outcome as yet.

COMPLAINTS BY NATURE

	Apr-Sep 2017/2018	Apr-Sep 2018/2019	Apr-Sep 2019/2020	Apr-Sep 2020/2021	Apr-Sep 2021/2022
Delay in responding to enquiries and requests	10.9%	13.8%	16.3%	11.2%	18.2%
Failure to meet our service standards	19.7%	21.5%	17.8%	13.1%	19.0%
Treatment by or attitude of a member of staff	29.4%	25.1%	24.8%	23.8%	21.2%
Failure to provide a service	25.3%	21.1%	25.6%	27.1%	25.2%
Dissatisfaction with our policy	8.3%	12.3%	11.2%	15.9%	12.6%
Failure to follow the proper administrative process	6.3%	6.2%	4.3%	8.9%	3.8%



LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS:**EXAMPLES OF HOW COMPLAINTS HAVE BEEN USED TO DRIVE SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS**

Anyone closing off a complaint as upheld or partially upheld is asked to identify planned service improvements, designed to prevent similar issues recurring. These often involve speaking to individual employees or arranging training for teams on correct use of procedures and customer care standards. Below are some examples of how complaints were used to identify process/service improvements during the first half of 2021/2022:

A customer complained that	We listened, we acted
An error had been made in not issuing Free School Meals, School Clothing Grants, Winter Hardship and Family Pandemic Payments.	Manual process for Covid payments has been changed to an automatic process which cuts out manual intervention and reduces human error.
They were unhappy with the wording of Debt Recovery letters given the pandemic situation and need to consider customers' circumstances.	Letters going from Corporate Debt to be reviewed, as part of wider collaborative working with other teams.
They had received further correspondence from the Council after advising they no longer dealt with a person's affairs and the Council now held Corporate Appointeeship.	Corporate Appointeeship transfer process to be reviewed to see whether correspondence addresses on other Council databases can be simultaneously updated when appointeeship is taken on.
Their property was not included in a programme for Roof Renewal.	Quality check now implemented on briefs once a month to ensure all projects briefed and ready, are sent to City Development in the correct timescales before notifications go out.
They were having difficulty getting the contractor to repair external wall insulation.	Material to be clearer from both the installer and managing contractor. DCC will also insert a paragraph into all 'sold in shell' properties from now on, highlighting post installation responsibilities.
School should have called an ambulance immediately after child's arm was injured in a playground accident, rather than waiting for parent to arrive.	Medical advice to schools re when to call an ambulance to be reviewed.
They were unhappy with positioning of new lighting columns and effect on light to residents' windows.	Future projects will take this design element into account and ensure plans are fully understood at consultation stage.

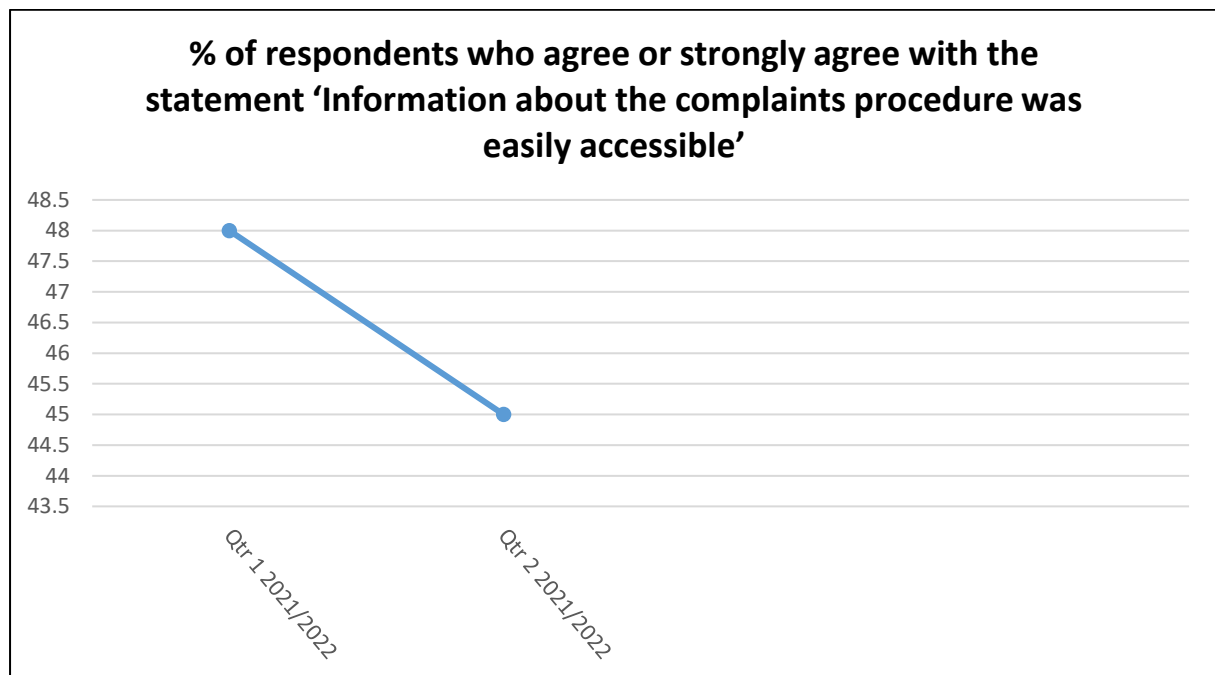
<p>Lids were missing from the euro bins, resulting in seagulls spreading rubbish over the street.</p>	<p>Crews have been reminded of the reporting process for damaged bins.</p>
<p>When trying to dispose of sand and gravel at recycling centre, relevant skips were often full and staff say there are no drivers/transport available to empty them.</p>	<p>Looking at having more drivers trained on these vehicles to give more flexibility.</p>
<p>They went online to enquire about having someone out to see if they had wasps or a hive on house. Didn't get a call to advise of cost, but people arrived to treat the issue then received a bill. Would not have gone ahead had they known cost.</p>	<p>Online booking form to be amended.</p>

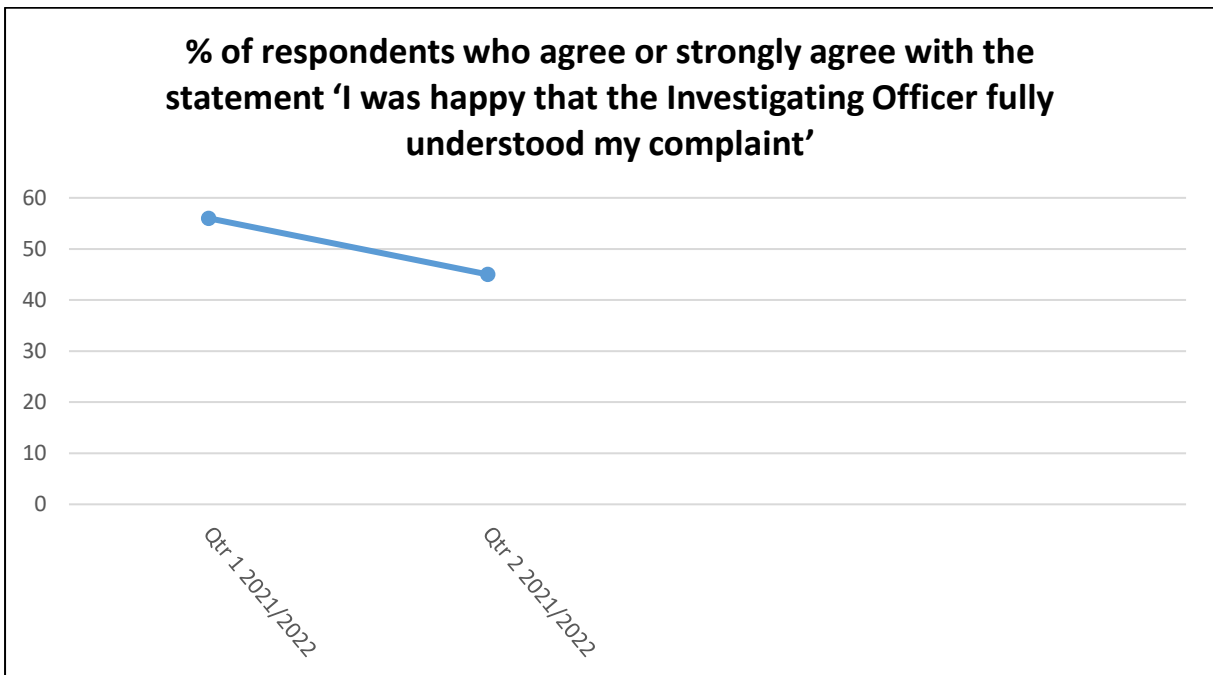
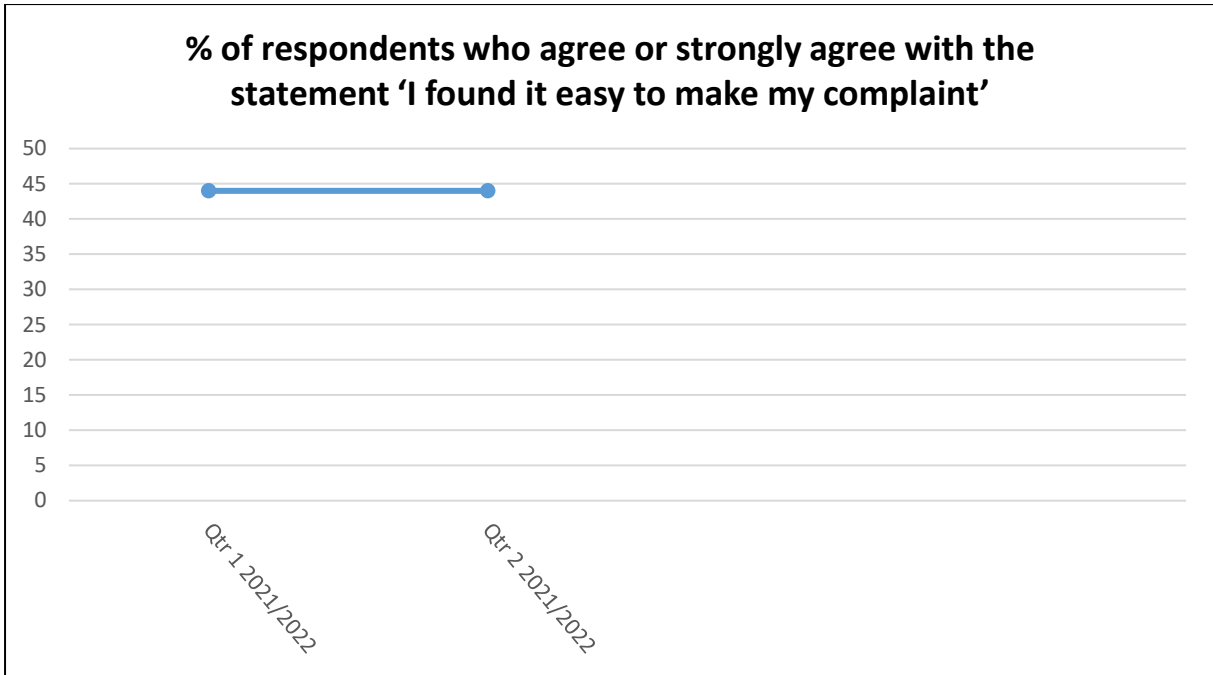
SATISFACTION WITH COMPLAINTS HANDLING

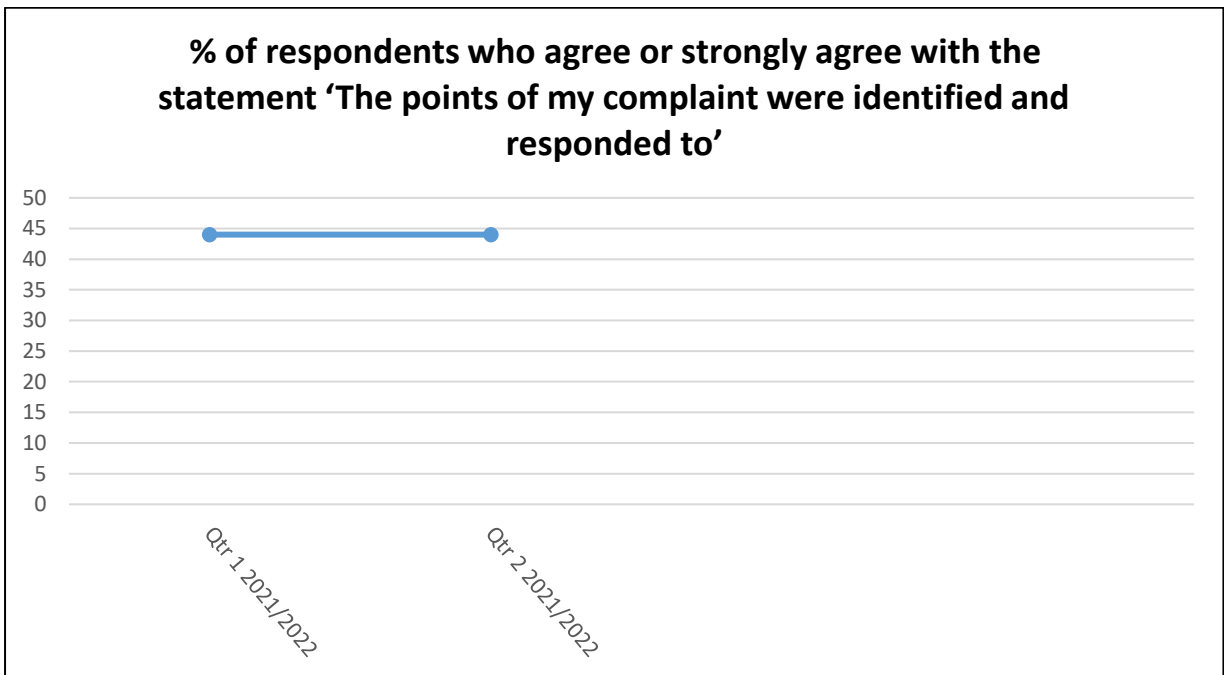
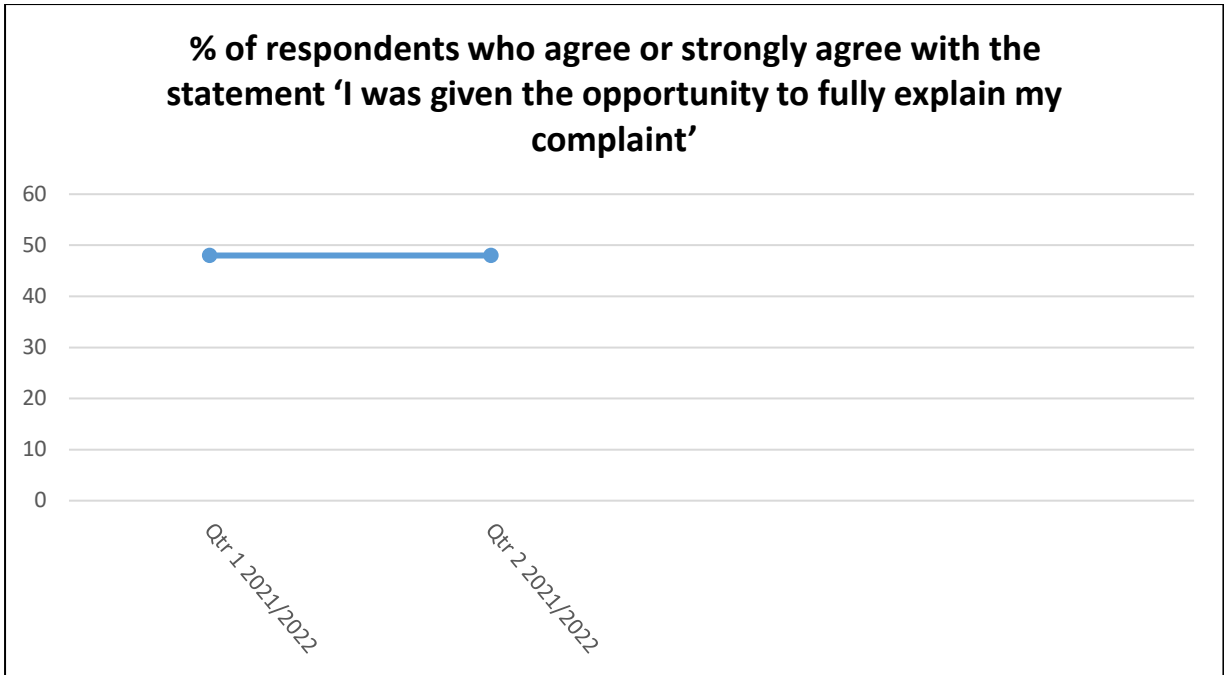
The model Complaints Handling Procedure requires the Council to report on a measure of customer satisfaction with its complaints process, and to do this we issue surveys every 3 months.

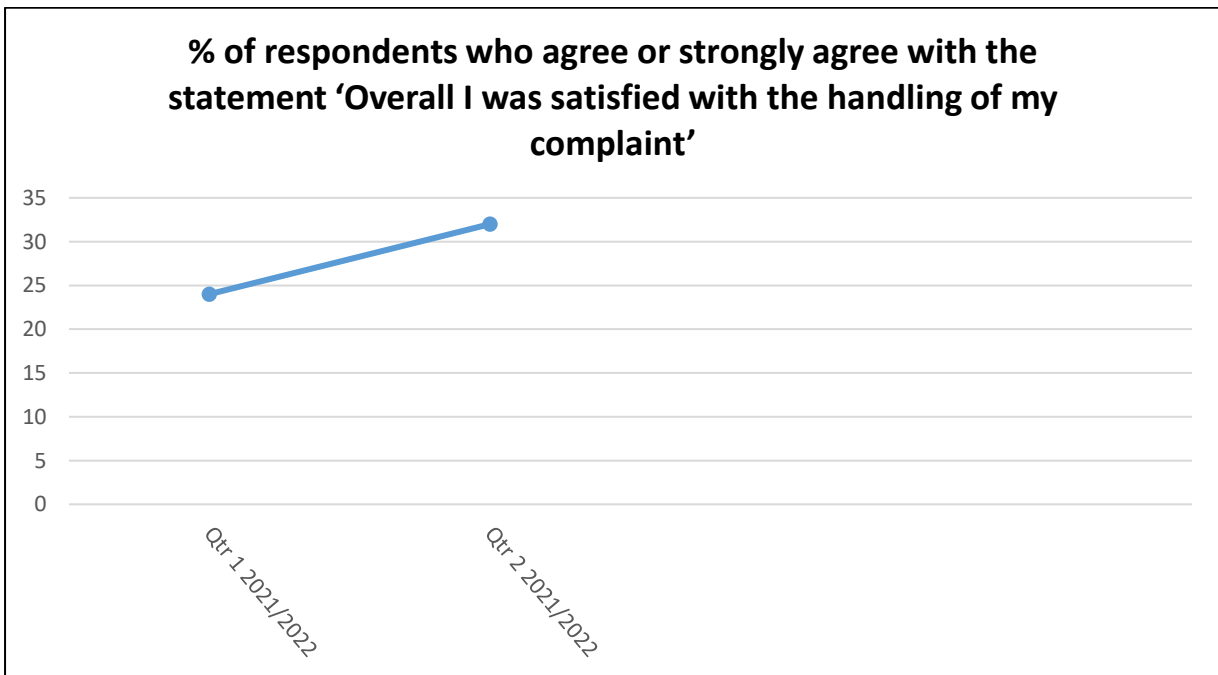
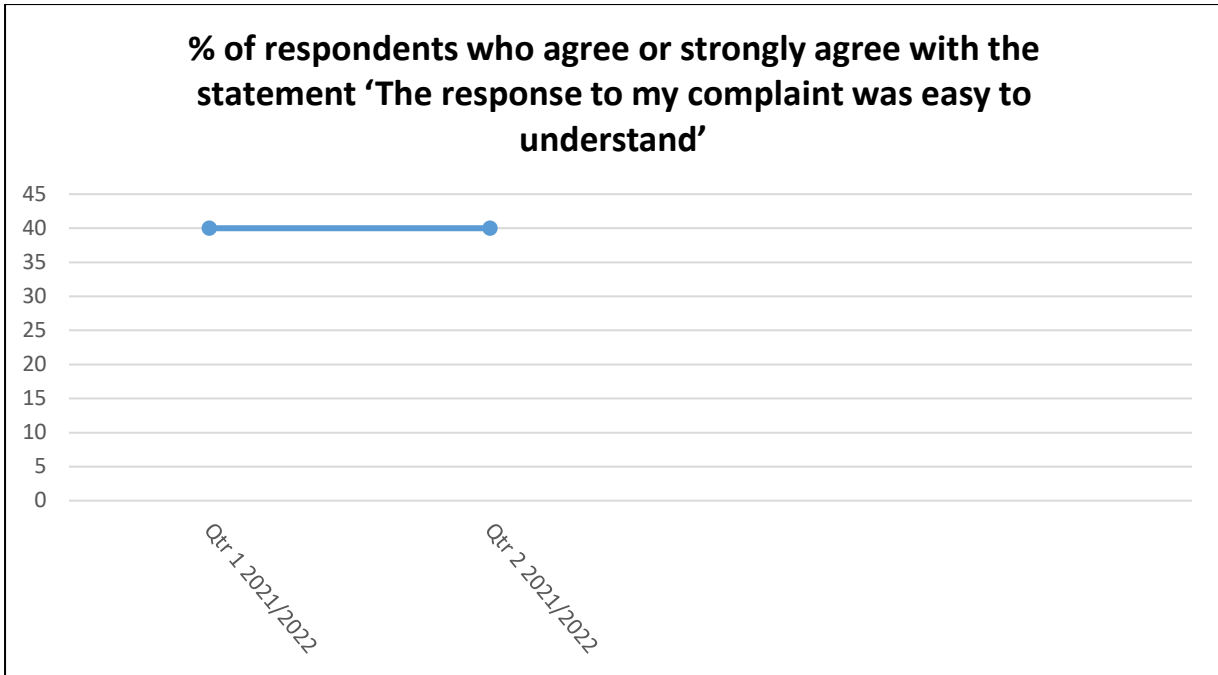
From the beginning of 2021/2022 we have been using a new survey agreed by the Scottish Local Authorities Complaint Handlers Network which is why trends from previous years are not shown as normal.

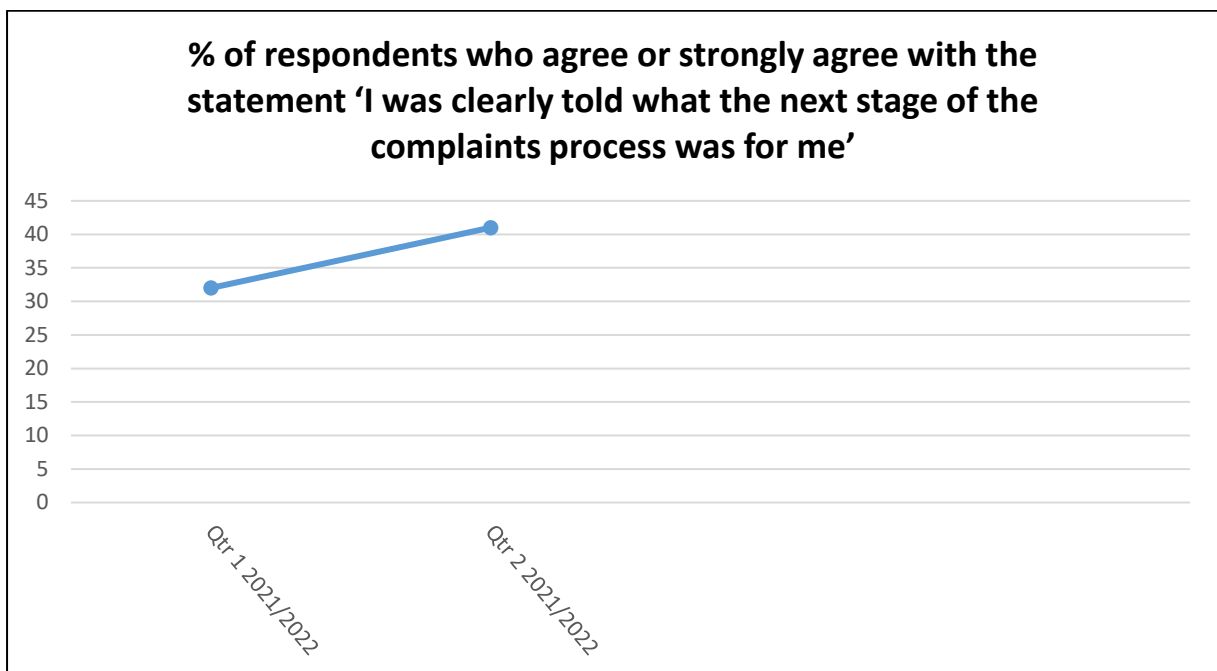
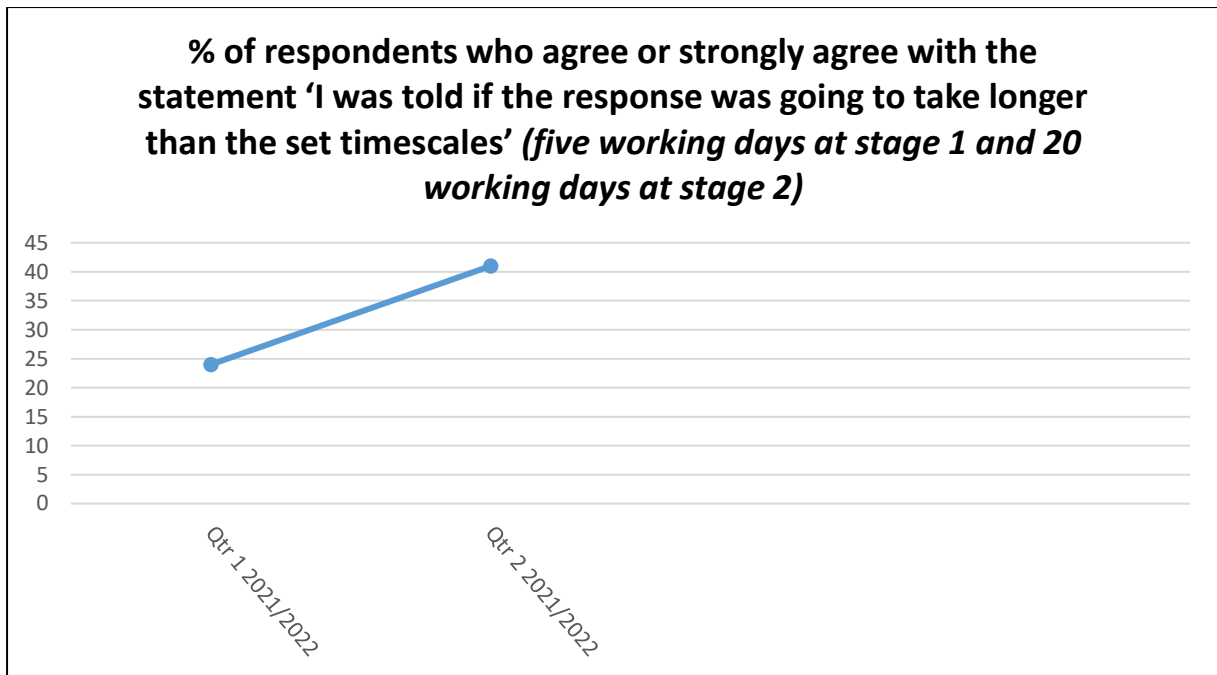
The charts below show the % of respondents who said they agreed or strongly agreed with each of the statements in the survey. Since the survey sample consists entirely of people who have made a complaint, many of which are not upheld, it may not be surprising that satisfaction levels are not particularly high. The aim is to increase the % of respondents who acknowledge that the process of dealing with their complaint was satisfactory and feel they have at least been heard, even if they did not get the outcome they desired.











COMPLIMENTS

Members suggested that it would be useful to include in this report examples of compliments which have been received about Council services.

Below are some examples of the compliments which were submitted during the first half of 2021/2022 on the 'Tell Us About Good Service' form on the Council's website:

- I contacted the council to follow up on a Planning Application, X took my call very effectively. She was proactive and friendly, following up immediately by email to the department and individuals on my behalf with copy back to me. Just wanted to pass on this commendation along with my appreciation.
- I would really like to highlight the communication and understanding of a particular employee from events and activities. I've had a particularly tumultuous year and this was combined with studying and of course Covid. I have an allotment and take great solace in this however I neglected to pay my fees unintentionally due to the stress of Covid and studying. I was contacted by x who has shown me great humility, patience and understanding. I would like to stress my appreciation for her excellent customer service.
- I just want to say a BIG thank you to whoever read my complaint (about heating) and listened to me and passed it over to the relevant department. Many thanks from a happy and cosy tenant.
- Excellent service for renewing my granddaughter's bus pass. X at customer services was very helpful.
- Thanks to x at Private Sector Services, the landlord promptly changed the broken boiler in the cold winter time. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.
- Charlotte Park is looking beautiful and well cared for. Would just like to thank those responsible.
- Contacted out of hours to report water overflowing from shower and call handler was efficient and fully explained process and sent request to private drain company to visit. Within the hour drain company arrived and very polite and pleasant throughout. Excellent customer service from company and out of hours service. Impressed by service received by all involved.
- Following a closure due to roadworks, the bin collection service in our street has resumed promptly on Tuesday this week in line with normal timetable. Many thanks for restarting our service.
- Would like to pass on my thanks for fantastic customer service I received from x today in the planning dept. She went over all information required and researched my query and sent on contact details for other council department. Please pass on my thanks.
- I want to compliment the lovely people I've interacted with over the last six weeks since moving to Dundee (from Angus) .The first two are girls who answer the phones for bin collection. They've been so nice and tried to help when my general waste isn't collected. They also helped me get my additional and larger recycling bins. The second is the lovely woman in the bulky uplift department who was very helpful and super nice when I phoned, Also, the gents who came to collect the bulky items - they were so friendly! Yesterday my new recycling bins were delivered and the gent was so nice too.
- I spoke to a lady about a bulky uplift. She couldn't have been more helpful in resolving the issue. She was a credit to the Council and the Service.

- Thanks so much for prompt response to fill in the pothole at the entrance to Balgay Hill/ Cemetery. It's made a massive difference. I'm sure all drivers will appreciate that the deep hole is now filled.
- I really do appreciate all the work that has been done for me and the workmen were clean and tidied up after them and went above and beyond their call of duty, really pleasant and helpful bunch of guys. All this has made my life a lot easier. Thank you very much and job well done.
- Thank you for planting wildflower seeds along Riverside Drive and for leaving large areas un-mowed. This is not only adding to the enjoyment and pleasure of driving into Dundee but also is magic for the local wildlife and insect life. Please keep doing it and extend to as many areas as possible!
- Young gentleman with council uniform was collecting waste and emptying bins beside Lochee Park this morning. He was very thorough and done an amazing job.
- Contacted you to say a pc tower had been dumped at the entrance to Riverside Nature Park. Yesterday morning I saw that it had already been removed. I was amazed and wanted to thank you for responding so quickly. Well done.
- Thank you for a speedy response re emptying dog waste bins.
- Thank you so much to the waste management team. Had a huge bulky uplift and the guys dealt with it so quickly and the customer service was exceptional. Great job, worth every penny. Office staff and lorry crew all fantastic.
- Contacted planning about the closure of a temporary footpath and when the original path would be reinstated. Would like x to know his response was very much appreciated and great customer service.
- Please thank all who have been involved in providing the wonderful wild flower 'displays' at Riverside and Dudhope circle to mention just two places. The displays are absolutely stunning - it would be great to have even more around the city. Well done to all.
- Wrote in at the weekend re Controlled Entry System and Bin Recess. Many thanks to whoever dealt with this, intercom now working. Just been to put bag of rubbish in large communal bin and the bin recess area is spotless.
- Thank you and your colleagues in the Registrars for your help in registering my dad's death. You do a wonderful job in very trying times and help so many people through the most difficult of times.
- (On a website where people share stories and photos about their weddings) The couple praised their amazing celebrant - 'we didn't get much chance to talk about the ceremony beforehand due to the nature of the pandemic but she was truly brilliant'.
- I can't praise x (at Customer Services) enough for her kindness, empathy and lovely manner. She also ensured I would receive a one-off payment from the Scottish Government for low income during the pandemic and advised me what happens with any changes in benefit amounts. She explained everything in clear and concise language so I was able to understand the process and have realistic expectations and timescales. It was her kind manner though that really stood out and put me at ease as this is all new to me. Anytime I have had to call DDC in recent months has been a good experience - I have to say everyone has been so well mannered and polite. Many thanks for making this journey into the complex world of benefits easier. DCC must be one of the best local councils in Scotland.
- I had a very positive experience of dealing with your staff (Tayside Pension Fund team) by email - communication was clear and professional but also very friendly. When I was unable to download documents that needed to be completed, they were posted to me swiftly without any fuss and staff accepted those documents by return alongside photographs of evidence that I submitted by email. I confess that I thought this might cause some confusion or delay

but things were processed quickly and efficiently for me. Overall, I just felt that I received a really impressive service from everyone I dealt with. Things have not been easy for staff over the past eighteen months or so, I'm sure, so I hope there will be some appreciation of the positive difference that good service can make to customers/clients.

- (To the Registrars) Just had to write and say Thank You! Thank you that you found me a place in the Citizenship Ceremony so quickly! Am so proud to be a British Citizen. I have to say that, considering all the restrictions placed by the awful Covid thing, you made the ceremony so wonderful and special.

In addition to the compliments made online, social care services often receive comments, cards etc direct from service users' families and care managers. Examples of those received recently include:

"The care home staff were very good and I am thankful for that ... I am sure you will continue to do a grand job as you did for us. If I had any wise words for anyone else it's to believe that with the right support a care home, after ample settling in time, can be a place to live out the last years. Keep safe".
 "Heartfelt thanks to all the carers and manager for their support, compassion and help over the last few years when dealing with my mum. Their assistance and care in mum's last few weeks was overwhelming".

"I am getting in touch to express how much I appreciate the effort and support we are receiving from x for my mum. Her support during this time has been excellent. I am deeply grateful not only for her caring and nurturing approach but also for her levels of professionalism ... without the support and commitment I honestly don't know how I would have got through these last few months".

"Thank you for everything you did for our mum, especially in the last 6 months when she needed that extra care and attention. Your care and kindness is much appreciated and all the family are extremely grateful to you".

