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# Corporate and Statutory Complaints Annual Report

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2020/2021

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May 2021

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## **Introduction**

This report provides an analysis of Corporate and Statutory complaints received by Lincolnshire County Council during the first and second quarters of 20/21. A countywide overview will determine any recurring themes across the council and additional analysis per service area will aim to pinpoint any specific areas of work.

The report also provides recommendations to the Corporate Leadership team (CLT) on how services, inclusive of Customer Relations, can be improved. CLT should consider these recommendations, and where possible, how these can be implemented.

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a significant impact on the services being provided by the council, this must be taken into consideration when reviewing the data within this report.

## **Corporate and Statutory Complaints Process**

Lincolnshire County Council's corporate and adult's complaints process has two formal stages, with statutory children's complaints having three. When an individual contacts the Customer Relations Team to raise their concerns early resolution will be attempted in order to avoid the formal process. These early resolution cases are referred to as contacts within this report. It should be noted that prior to the teams move from Serco back to LCC, early resolution was not attempted in any cases, therefore there is no data in regards to this from previous years.

If early resolution is not possible a contact will then enter the formal process at stage 1. Once a response to this has been provided complainants wishing to escalate their complaint to the next stage must advise the Complaints Manager of the reasons that they remain dissatisfied. For corporate and Adults complaints a further internal investigation is undertaken. Once complete, and a response sent, the complainant may contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

For children's statutory complaints an escalation to stage 2 requires the commissioning of an independent investigator. Their investigation will be overseen by another independent officer and, once complete, the council will respond based on their findings. Should a complainant question the findings and councils response they can request that the investigation be reviewed by an independent panel; this being stage 3 of the statutory process.

Once a panel has convened and a response provided the complainant may contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

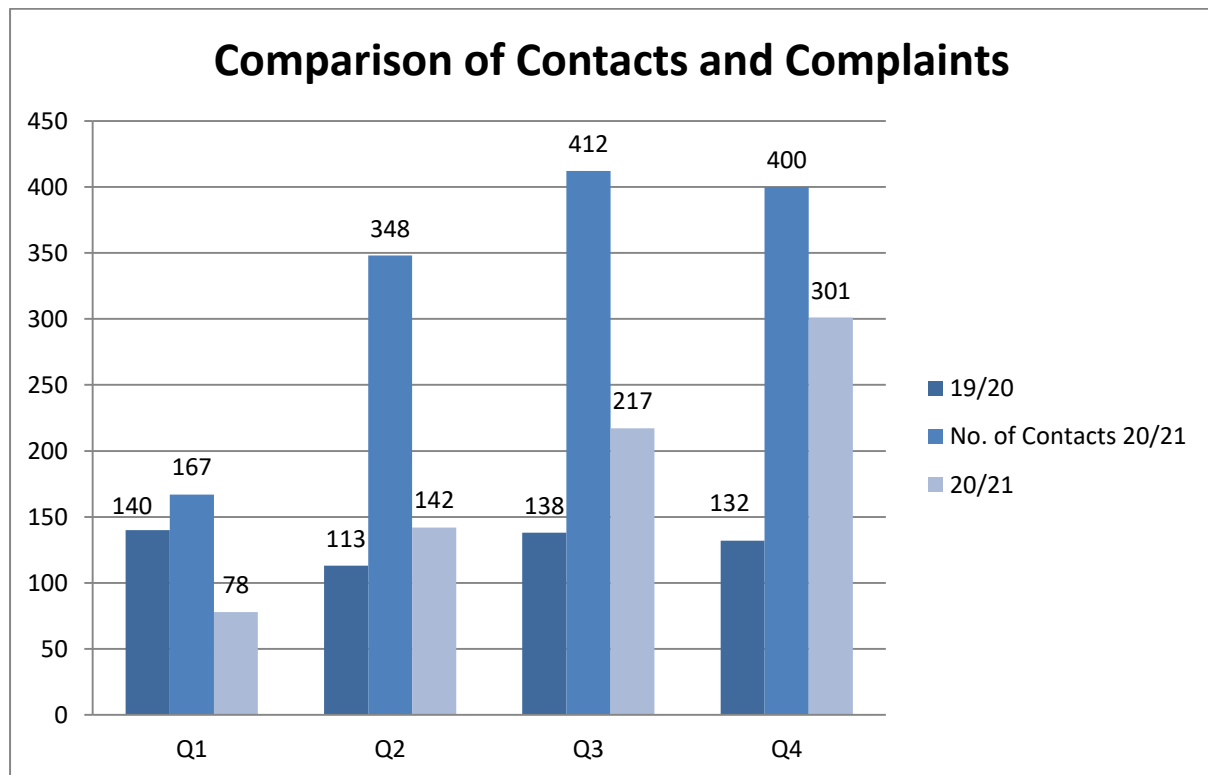
## **Countywide Overview**

20/21 saw 1327 contacts received from the public; to express dissatisfaction with the services they had been provided. Of these 1327 contacts 738 went on to enter the formal complaints process, with the remaining 589 being resolved to the customers satisfaction, and requiring no further action or investigation, through early resolution. This equated to 42% of all contacts received.

In comparison to the same quarters of the previous year, the council has seen a substantial increase in contacts throughout the year. Each quarter saw an increase on the previous with an exception of the Q4 which received 12 fewer contacts than the previous quarter, but still an increase in the number of contacts entering the formal process. Overall there was a 41% increase in comparison to

the previous year. It should be considered that the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions has had a significant effect on the numbers being reported. This is a mixture of both a change in the way services had to be delivered and the way in which the public have interacted with the council.

The following shows the total number of complaints received in 2019/2020, the number of contacts received in 20/21 and the number of those contacts entering the formal complaints process in 20/21.

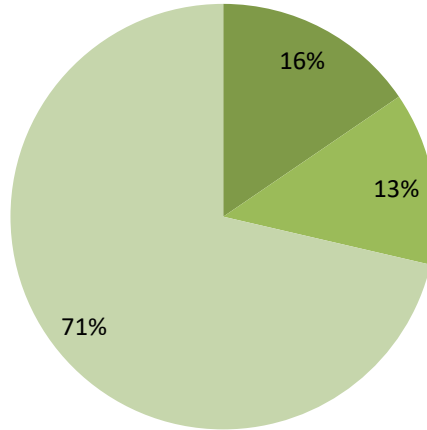


For all services, complaints which have been found to be either fully or partially upheld, have been analysed further in order to determine if there are any common factors which can be improved for future service provision. It is these cases that are now being used to make recommendations to services on things which require work and improvement.

The following shows the overall outcomes of all formal complaints in 20/21;

## Outcomes of Complaints

■ Upheld ■ Partially Upheld ■ Not Upheld

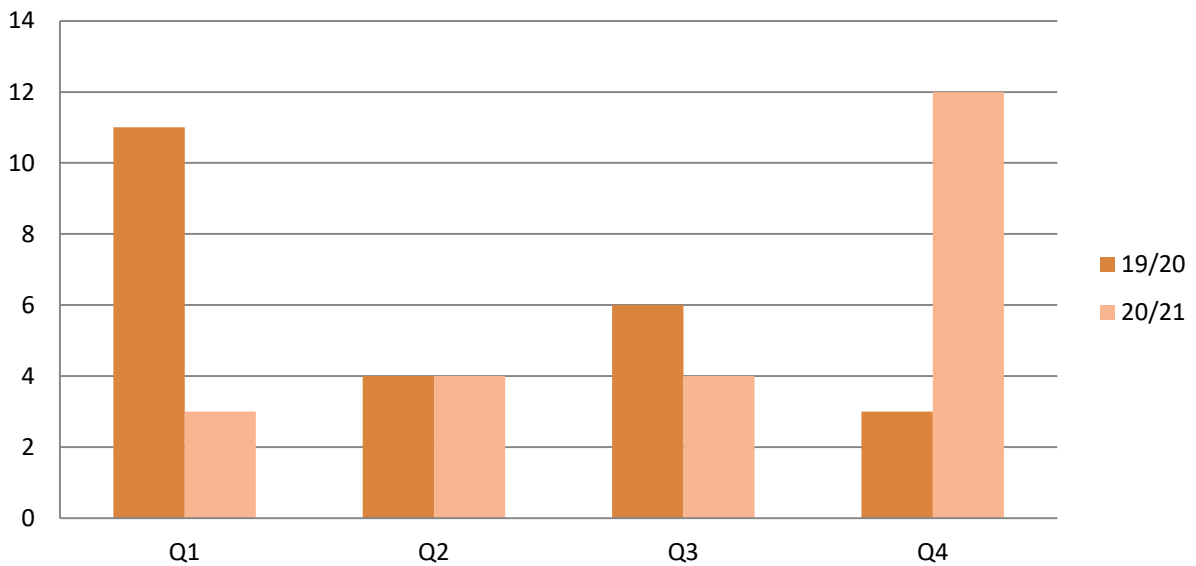


In total 131 complaints were upheld throughout the course of the year and 137 were partially upheld. This figure has been impacted by the pandemic, with government guidelines being regularly updated many services have needed to adapt and update in short periods of time.

20/21 has seen 23 cases escalated to the next stage of the complaints process. Of these 23 cases 1 case is within the Children's statutory complaints process. This case remains open at the time of writing this report. The number of escalations in total is similar to the previous year.

The following shows the number of escalations in comparison to the previous year, per quarter;

## Escalation of Complaints



Whilst there was an increase in the final quarter, overall the year saw a 4% decrease in comparison to the previous year. The continuing use of a corporate template, ensuring that all aspects of a complaint are addressed at the initial stage, by the Customer Relations Team, prevents any issues from being missed and therefore requiring an escalation to receive a fully complete response.

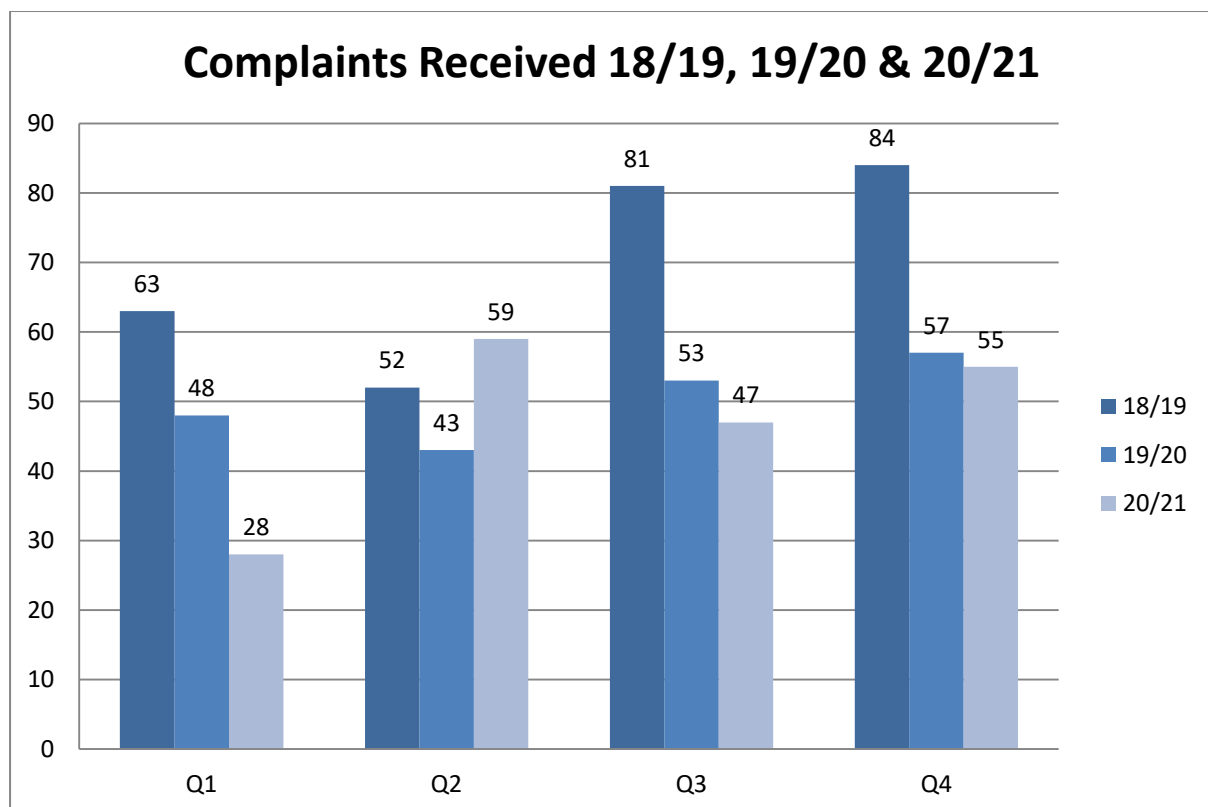
Previously requests for escalation were determined by the originating service area, however this responsibility has now moved to the Complaints Manager to ensure these requests meet the policy requirements. This has had a significant impact on reducing escalations. Investigating managers have done considerable work in ensuring that details of their investigations are as thorough as possible and this is reflected within the figures shown.

### **Children's Services**

With restrictions in place resulting from the Coronavirus pandemic, Children's services had to change some of the processes they had in place. The main change was been no longer meeting complainants face to face to resolve issues and concerns. Despite this, the service area has continued to engage in the process, and with restrictions easing will be re-introducing previous processes.

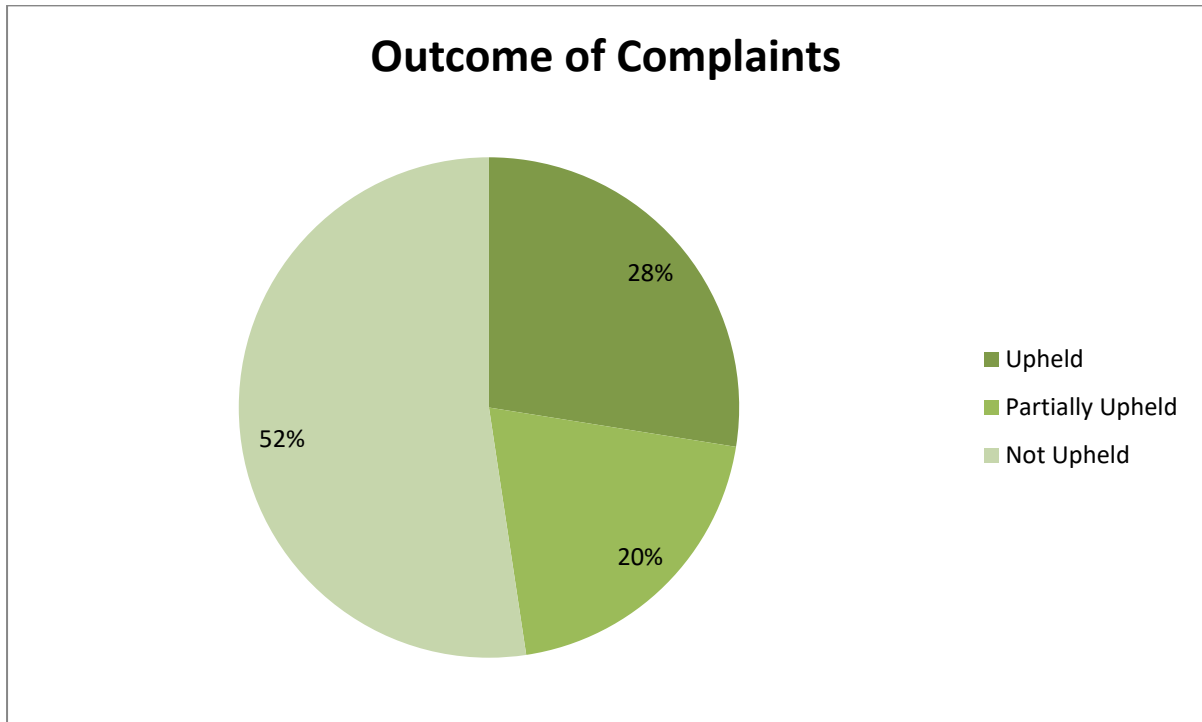
A total of 260 contacts were received in 20/21 in relation to Children's services, both corporate and statutory, from the public expressing dissatisfaction with the services being provided. Of these 189 entered the formal complaints process. The remaining 71 were resolved early to the satisfaction of the customer. This number accounts for 27% of all contacts received.

The following shows that comparison of formal complaints received in 18/19, 19/20 and 20/21;



Following an increase in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter the volume returned to similar figures seen in the previous year. As with many other services there were difficulties in terms of managing services in line with restrictions in place at the time.

Out of the 189 cases which entered the formal complaints process, 99 cases found no fault in the way in which services were delivered. 38 cases were partially upheld and 25 cases were upheld.

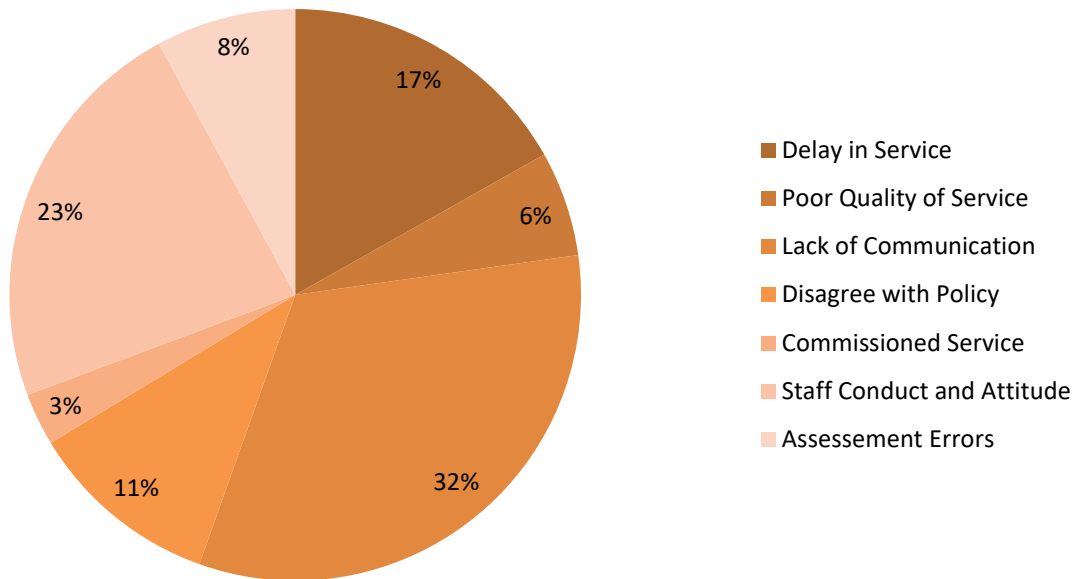


Analysis was undertaken on those complaints partially or fully upheld in order to determine if there were any trends or common factors. This data was then used to give recommendations to the service in areas which they should seek to improve and what could be introduced to meet this.

Whilst these recommendations continue to be provided to the service area, with the unique situation observed in 20/21, some areas are considered inevitable and this has also been agreed with by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. This relates particularly to delays in services being provided and changes to services.

The following shows the reasons of all upheld complaints and the aspects of those complaints partially upheld, where fault was found;

## Reasons for Complaint where fault was found



Delays in service were expected as mentioned earlier in this report. Whilst this will continue to be monitored in case there are on-going concerns, it should be considered that a number of areas were delayed in providing services whilst guidance was being made available. Some services would have needed to be postponed during harsher restrictions over the year.

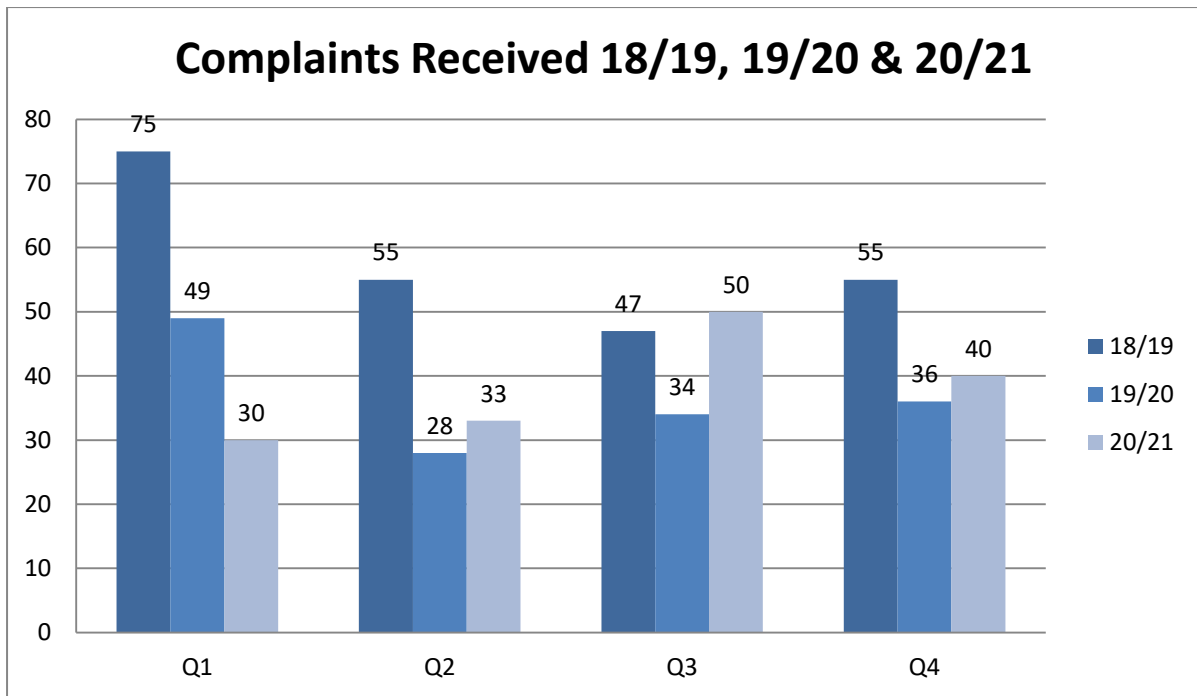
Lack of communication remains one of the largest impacting areas where standards are not being met. This remains an area where improvements are being implemented; however, again it should be considered that this year saw staff taking on additional responsibilities throughout the pandemic, in order to maintain service delivery in all areas.

### **Adults Care & Community Wellbeing**

Whilst there was a spike in the number of contacts received in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, overall, the service was consistent in the number of contacts being received from the public and the number of these contacts entering the formal complaints process, in comparison to the previous year. The service continues to undertake analysis and use this in informing policy and/or procedural changes.

In 20/21 the service saw 210 contacts received from the public to express dissatisfaction with the services delivered. Of these 153 entered the formal complaints process. The remaining 57 were resolved early to the satisfaction of the customer. This number accounts for 27% of all contacts received in the area. This area in particular has been affected by the pandemic given its work with vulnerable adults and adults receiving both residential and non-residential care.

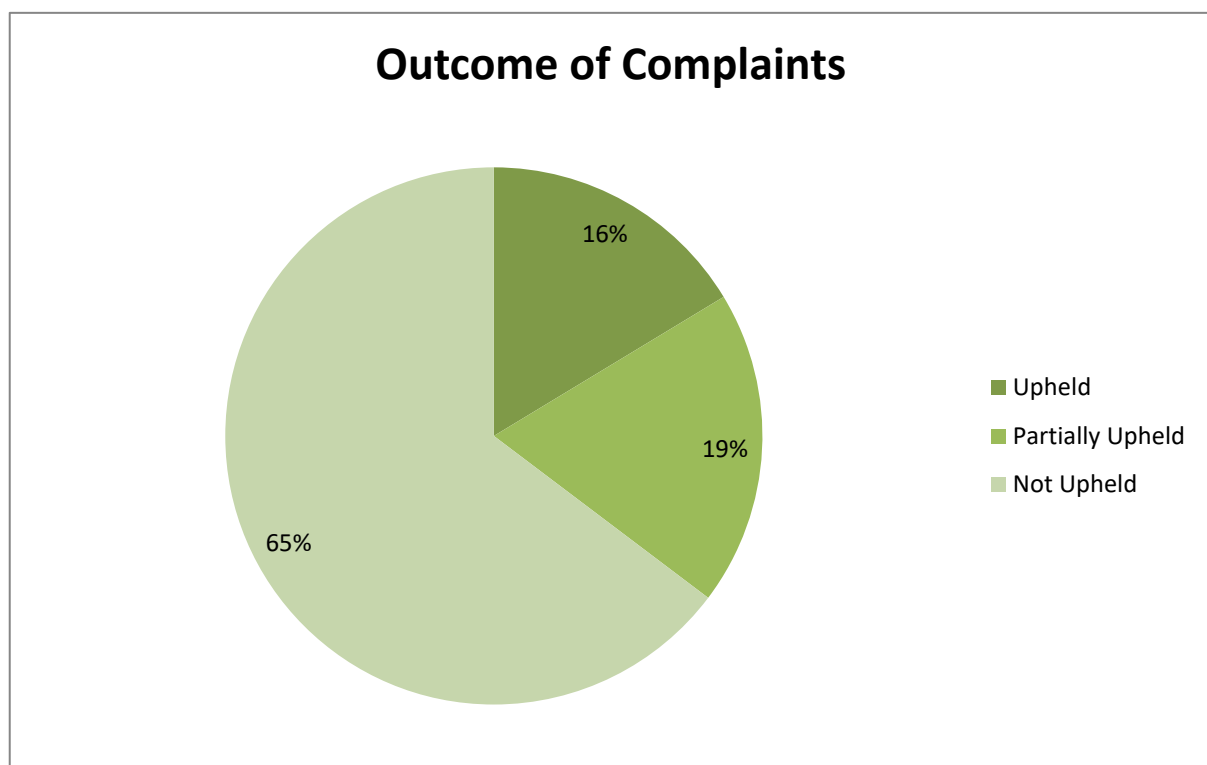
The following shows that comparison of formal complaints received in 18/19, 19/20 and 20/21;



Quarterly reporting is still completed by staff within service, with figures and additional details being provided by the complaints function. This is currently inconsistent with other service areas. As mentioned an increase was seen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 20/21, following which figures returned to similar numbers seen in previous quarters, both of the same year and previous years.

When looking at the outcome of complaints in this area the year saw 25 complaints upheld and 29 complaints partially upheld. The remaining 99 saw no fault in the services which were delivered.

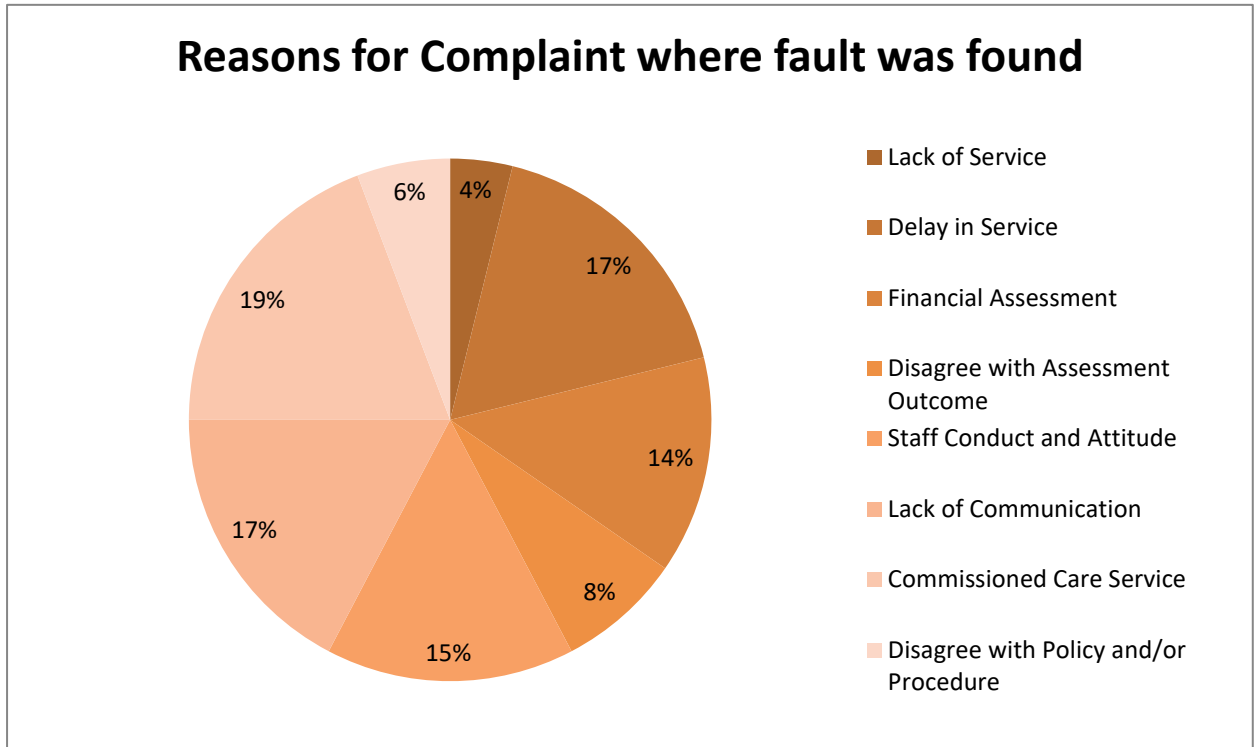
The following shows the outcomes of all complaints in this area;





Analysis was undertaken on those complaints partially or fully upheld in order to determine if there were any trends or common factors. This data was then provided to relevant staff within the service for additional review and decision on areas of improvement.

The following shows where fault was found in complaints that were upheld and the founded aspects of those complaints partially upheld;



A lack of communication and delays accounted for 34% of all upheld and partially upheld complaints. As mentioned earlier in this report some delays within service were to be expected given the circumstances faced in this year.

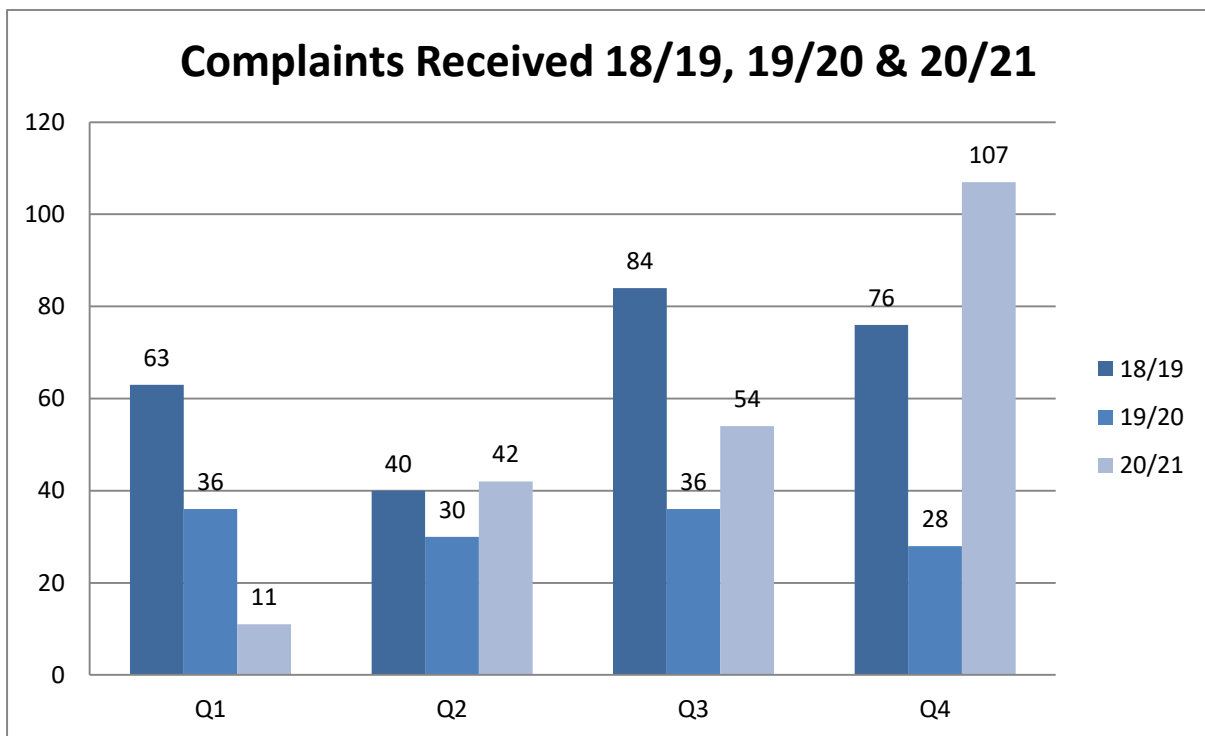
A drop has been seen in the number of complaints where fault was found that related to financial assessments. Given that the service has been working on this area it is hoped that this work will continue to contribute to a decrease in complaint relating to this where fault is found.

### **Highways and Transport**

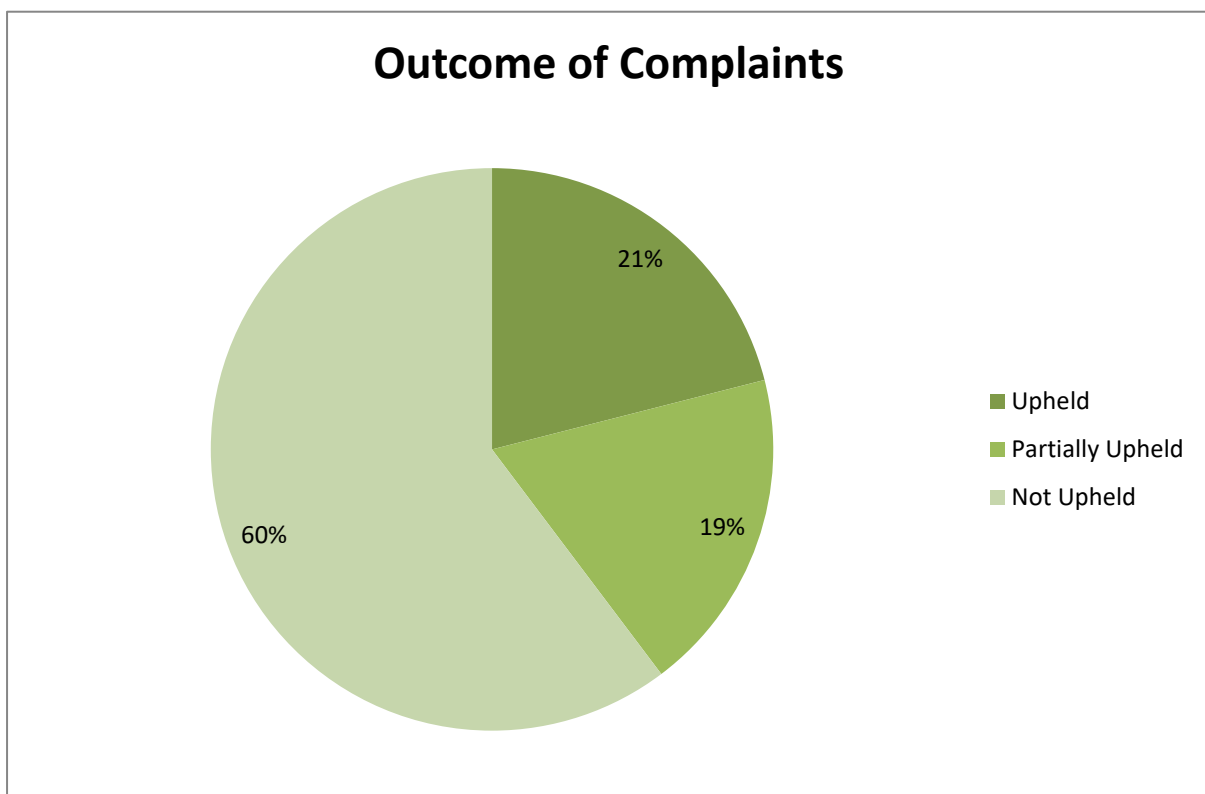
Highways and Transport have continued to take a proactive approach in their attempts at dealing with contacts informally and this has been greatly assisted by the involvement of their support staff. This is the area which shows the most contacts resolved early without the need to enter the formal process.

The year saw 529 contacts received from the public to express dissatisfaction with the services received. Of these 214 entered the formal complaints process over the course of the year. The remaining 315 were resolved early to the satisfaction of the customer. This number accounts for 56% of all contacts received.

The following shows that comparison of formal complaints received in 18/19, 19/20 and 20/21;

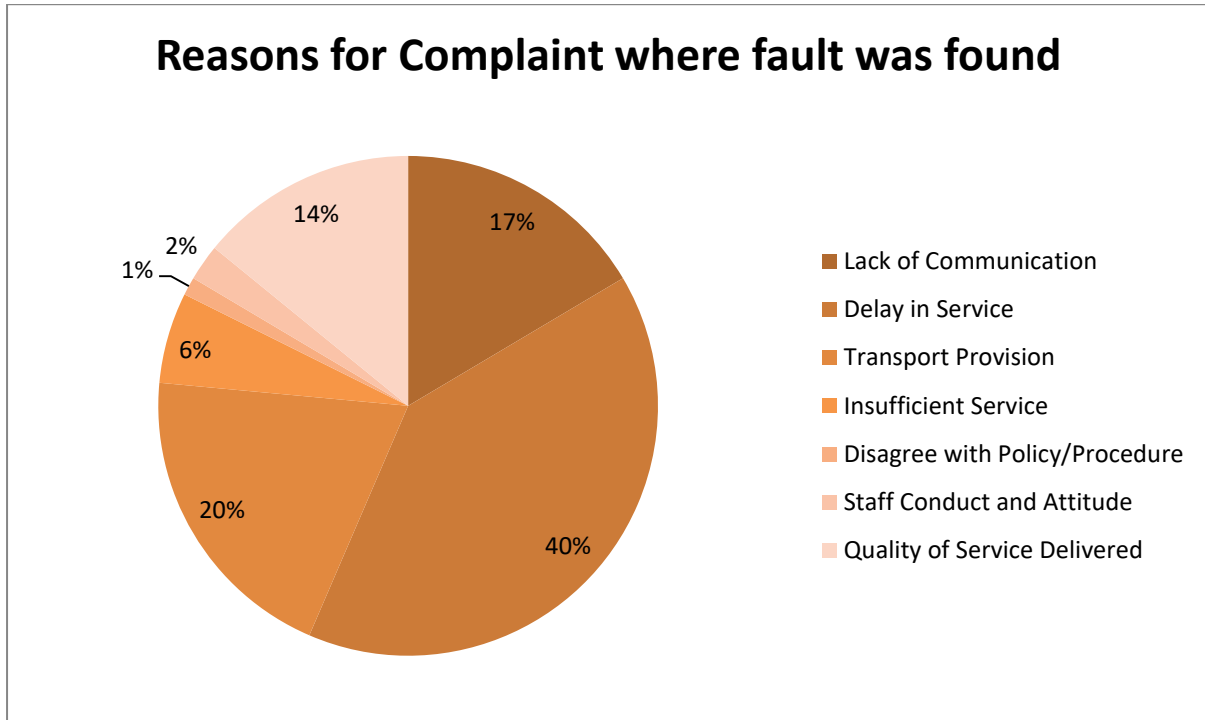


The final quarter of 20/21 saw almost double the number of complaints in comparison to the previous quarter. It should be noted that several comments, feedback and social media posts, which can be evidenced, were made by members of the public indicating that they were using time now available to them, as a result of the pandemic, to complain to the council. Outcomes of complaints show that there is no significant increase in areas where fault was found only that the numbers being received increased.



Analysis was undertaken on those complaints partially or fully upheld in order to determine if there were any trends or common factors.

The following shows where fault was found in complaints that were upheld and the aspects of those complaints partially upheld;



The largest area where fault was found was around delays in service. Further review of these complaints shows that over half of these linked to the same time period where resources had to be diverted in order to deal with adverse weather conditions and emergencies as a result of this.

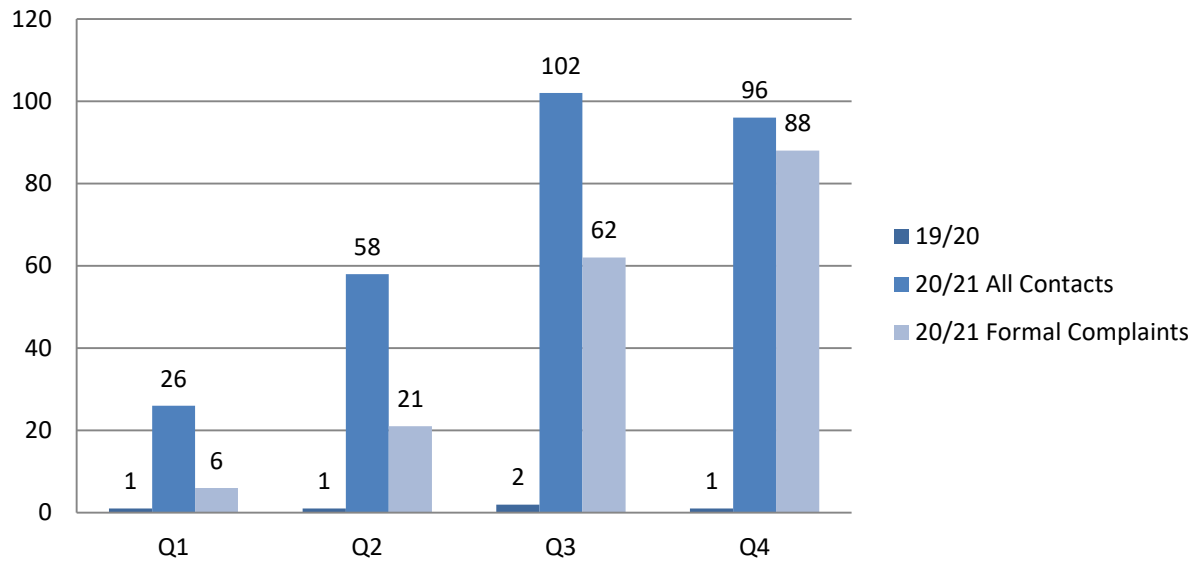
#### **Household Waste Recycling Centres**

Waste services have seen a large increase in the number of contacts and complaints received this year in comparison to previous years. The data shows a 3440% increase in complaints in 20/21 in comparison to 19/20. Given this increase the management of complaints has been an evolving process for the service area.

20/21 saw a total of 282 contacts received from the public to express dissatisfaction with the service that was being delivered. Of these contacts 177 entered the formal complaints process, with the remaining 105 being resolved early to the satisfaction of the customer.

The following shows the number of complaints received per quarter against the same data of last years;

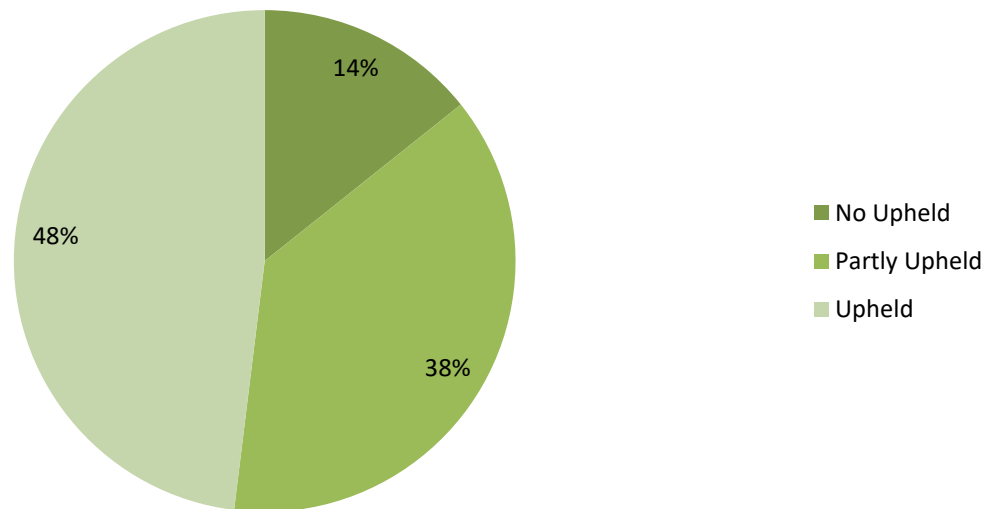
## Comparison of Complaints and Contacts Received 19/20 - 20/21



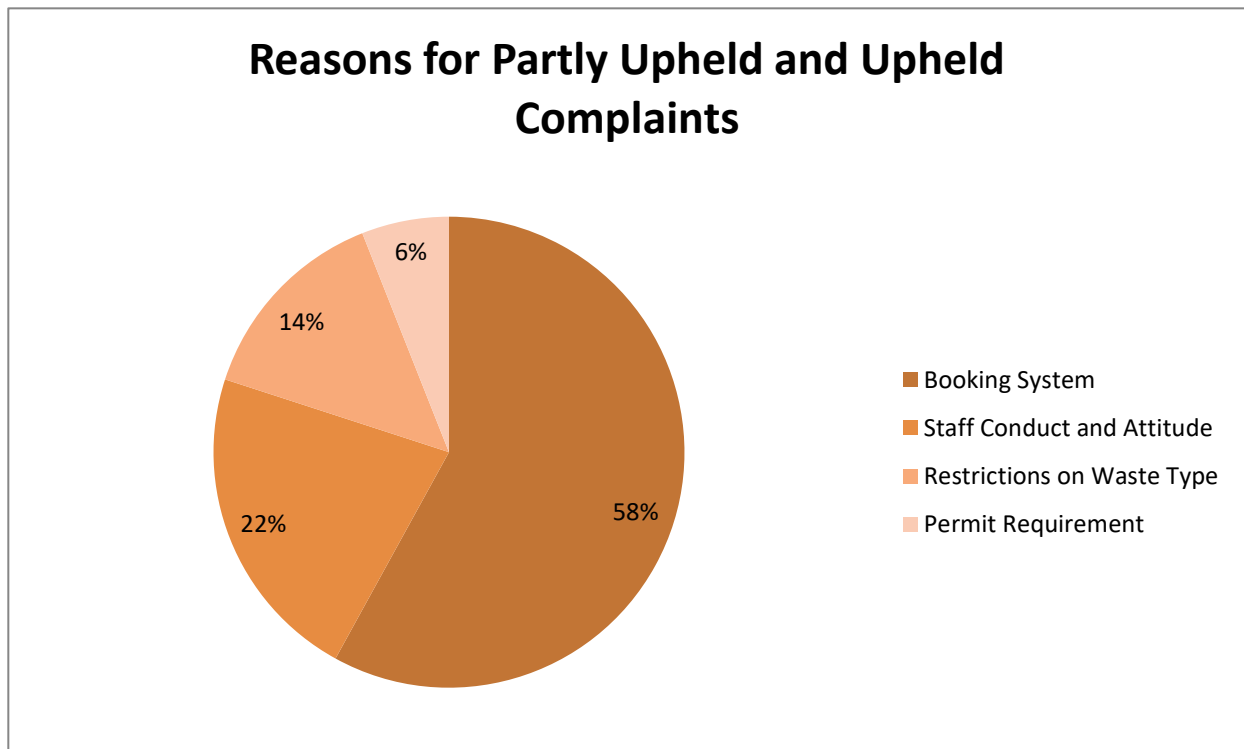
We have seen an increase every quarter of this year in the contacts and complaints that have been received in relation to this area. It should be considered that procedures have continued to be updated and adapted when new guidelines around Covid-19 have been provided. The introduction of strict social distancing measures are a key contributing factor to this increase and the general dissatisfaction with the new measures that have been put in place.

When looking at the outcomes of these complaints a total of 37 complaints were upheld in full. 29 of the complaints raised found some fault in the way in which the service had been delivered, so were partly upheld, and the remaining 111 were not upheld. This breakdown is shown below.

## Outcomes of Complaints Received



Analysis was undertaken on those complaints partly or fully upheld in order to determine any common themes and trends. The following shows where fault was found in complaints that were upheld and the aspects of those complaints partly upheld.



Issues with the booking system accounted for over half of all upheld or partly upheld complaints. Review of these complaints shows that the cases where the complaints were upheld was due to;

- issues with using the site, particularly when the system was first introduced
- some misinformation on the website as things evolved during the course of the year
- a lack of assistance in using the system when an individual had called in.

Issues with the customer service on site have been raised with the service area and it is recommended that where staff requires additional training in regards to the expectations of how customer service should be delivered, this is provided at the earliest opportunity. This area continues to be monitored and further cases are being escalated immediately.

Of the 177 cases received 2 cases were escalated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the complaints process as not all issues had been addressed in the 1<sup>st</sup> stage. Both of these cases were not upheld.

#### **Environment and Planning**

There continue to be only a relatively small amount of complaints in relation to this area. In total 29 contacts were received from the public to express dissatisfaction with this area. Of these contacts 69% (20) were resolved without entering the formal complaints process.

9 complaints were recorded for this area. 8 of these were not upheld with the remaining complaint being partially upheld. This was due to a delay in a service being provided and this was remedied as

a result of the complaint. This area saw no escalation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the formal complaints process.

### **Trading Standards**

1 complaint was received in regards to Trading Standards. This was in relation to a case which had not been pursued any further, with the individual who had reported the matter being dissatisfied with the outcome. This complaint was not upheld and request for escalation denied on the grounds that every aspect of the complaint had been addressed and a further investigation would not result in different outcome for the complainant. This case has since been investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and no fault was found.

### **Public Protection and Communities**

14 contacts were received in this area. Of these 7 contacts were resolved through early resolution. The remaining 7 were investigated under stage1 of the complaints process; 3 had an outcome of either partially or fully upheld and 4 with an outcome of not upheld. The 3 cases were in relation to the changing regulations relating to social distancing measures in place during ceremonies and the delay around information being conveyed to the customer. One also included concerns around rebooking ceremonies due to the regulations and payments for a rebooked ceremony. All 3 cases were remedied as a result of the complaint and were not escalated.

*\*The remaining complaints which have not been factored into these figures were for various areas including HR and recruitment services and delays in pension etc.*

### **Conclusion**

The year has been difficult for all service areas and overall we continue to see an increase in the number of contacts being made to the Customer Relations Team. Whilst recommendations have been made to services in regards to improvements, all areas should be commended for the continued efforts applied to dealing with complaints.

Whilst historically not included within reports an area currently being monitored is timescales being met. This has not been an area of concern as compliance rates have been extremely positive. However with difficulties this year being faced this compliance has seen a steady decline and is being monitored closely, with a drive to improve this figure by years end. Currently this data is being shared with relevant Heads of Service in order to achieve this. Should this area continue to see a decline figures will be provided in future reporting, given that this is an area where the LGSCO are able to find fault with the council.