

SWT Tenants Strategic Group

Monday, 30th May, 2022,
6.00 pm

**Somerset West
and Taunton**

The John Meikle Room - The Deane
House

[SWT MEETING WEBCAST LINK](#)

Members: Alex Akhigbemen (Chair), Jessie Bunn, Paul Cram,
Colin England, Kevin Hellier, Ivor Hussey, Luke Manning,
Samantha Rickward, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd and
Francesca Smith

Agenda

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Apologies | |
| 2. Welcome from Chair | |
| 3. Notes from previous meeting | (Pages 5 - 10) |
| 4. Appointment of New Chair | |
| 5. Annual complaints Report | (Pages 11 - 26) |
| 6. Q4 Performance Report | (Pages 27 - 32) |
| 7. Planned capital works for year, alongside retrofit approach presentation – Ian Candlish & Chris Brown (Informal agenda item,(presentation to be given on the night) | |
| 8. Directorate Report | (Pages 33 - 38) |
| 9. AOB | |



ANDREW PRITCHARD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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SWT Tenants Strategic Group - 28 March 2022

Present: Alex Akhigbemen (Chair)

Jessie Bunn, Paul Cram, Colin England, Kevin Hellier, Ivor Hussey,
Luke Manning and Samantha Rickward

Officers: James Barrah, Stephen Boland, Chris Brown, Ian Candlish, Kerry Prisco,
Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager), Sharon Yarde (Housing),
Sharon Sloan and Tracey Meadows

Also Present: Councillor Janet Lloyd

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

36. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Lithgow

37. **Notes from previous meeting**

Action points in the minutes from the previous meeting required clarification, they were;

- Window replacement – was the plan to replace double glazing with triple glazing correct? *we were still working up the strategy on this and will be balancing the specification of various components. Triple glazing will be going into the new build properties, but we were not necessarily going to have to put in triple glazing in all our properties. There is a lot of information on our stock and this is working through all the different insulation measures on the property including the glazing. We think that most houses would be able to achieve very low power consumption without the need for triple glazing. Some properties such as bungalows tend to be harder to reach lower levels, they tend to be more difficult due to too many exposed walls. There was not anything definitive yet, but it was looking more likely that double glazing will get us to where we needed to be with a lot of other measures that we were planning;*

The minutes were agreed by the board members.

38. **Directorate Plan- presentation by James Barrah**

The Directorate Plan was presented by James Barrah (Director of Housing and Communities) along with slides stating Housing and Communities Key achievements 21-22, circulated with the agenda.

During discussion of this item the following points/questions were raised;

(summarised)

- Concerns with training for new starters;
- Did CCTV cover housing land and did we use the HRA account to cover adopted roads on housing land? *We have 70 cameras across council. The estate did include some that were paid for by the Housing Revenue Account. The cameras were situated in Halcon, North Taunton and Wellington. We recognised the benefits of cameras for community reassurance and this was a relatively small contribution from the HRA because there were a number of cameras on estates that were quite small due to cameras being in the Town Centres;*
- How much of the HRA 7-year business plan would be scrapped through unitary? *No budget would be scrapped, the main concern was trying to predict inflation on materials now in the current world. Our assumption would anyway be refreshed annually so it was a constantly evolving entity due to constant change. A legal provision would be in place that meant the Council could have only one Housing Revenue Account, so effectively from day one we needed to stitch two together. Altair would be working on this business plan for us;*
- Homes of Sedgemoor repairs were of a higher standard than the present Council, what will this look like going forward for SWT? *Homes in Sedgemoor had a contracted service so contractors would do repairs differently. A piece of work was underway to lay out and describe all of our service standards and compare and contrast so that every service across the Council was the same or very similar due to the same sort of business;*

The report was noted.

39. **Performance & Finance report Q3 - Shari Hallett and Kerry Prisco**

2021/22 Housing Scorecard Quarter 3. The report provided an update on the housing performance through key performance measures and financial information for the second quarter of 21/22 (October to December 21)

During discussion of this item the following points/questions were raised; (summarised)

- The wording on the Lettings and Voids indicator, second bullet point needed to be reworded. At present this read (Providing decorating packs for able-bodied tenants, rather than undertaking full redecorating to let the property quicker) was there a way to reword this as it was quite offensive to read if you were not an able bodied person; *Apologies for the clumsiness in the wording this was not our intention to offend anyone. We would look at more appropriate wording for any future reports. It was important to keep making us aware of these lapses in wording in our reports;*

- Were decorating pack offered to disabled people as it was my understanding that a lot of the decorating would be done for them due to their disability;
- Concerns that the performance indicators were very misleading. Officers need to come back to the group with real vast amounts of feedback from people otherwise these indicators were not worth mentioning to the group; *This was a discussion that we had internally. We do not want to report nothing to the group, but if this is the feedback from the group, I would support this decision internally. It should be noted that any feedback is good, whether good or bad.* The Chair stated that he would like Officers to carry on collecting this data and recommended that Officers sought to improve how this data was collected.
- Information on the new Tenant satisfaction survey for lettable standard information on the total number of new tenants for that quarter would be helpful; *This information would be brought to you at the next meeting;*
- Concerns that you were only concentrating on getting your information from the internet. You were excluding a huge number of tenants as some elderly tenants were not on the internet or internet savvy; *This was something that we were looking at in the next paper. We were aware of this for some of our elderly Tenants. Officers would look at the technical document for the tenant satisfaction measures to see what they suggest from the regulator;*
- How were you covering the extra cost of labour, materials and interest payments. Were you covering these out of the money saved in the budget or were you borrowing more money ? *In terms of interest payments on borrowing, we cover those costs from the revenue budgets. In terms of capital programme we had a number of different sources of finance for that in terms of major and improvements we covered a majority of that spend from what we had got from the Major Funds Reserve, so when we depreciate our assets every financial year, we are then able as part of the HRA account move that depreciated cost and hold in a separate reserve to then use that money over here to fund a capital programme and the major and improvement cost each financial year. There was no borrowing or interest paid;*

The group noted the content of the housing score card for quarter 3 (October-December) 2021.

40. **Tenant Satisfaction measures and Star survey - Shari Hallett**

2021/22 Housing Tenant Satisfaction Measures and RAR Survey

The report provided:

- Awareness of the TSM (tenant satisfaction measurement) requirement from RSH which is currently in consultation and our preparations for TSM formal submission.

- Awareness of next steps in relation to STAR survey due to be undertaken in SWT by the end of 2022.

During discussion of this item the following points/questions were raised; (summarised)

- Were the questions for the survey to be asked over the phone or through the internet? *This is a telephone survey so will be over the phone. There will be an option for us to also send links out to mobile numbers to see if we can get online surveys back for more data;*
- How will the customers be chosen for this survey? *An encrypted data file is sent to the organisation who will randomly select tenants. The organisation would look for tenure types with statical information that told them how many tenants they needed for each type of tenure. No steer was provided to them from SWT;*
- Concerns that there were no questions in the survey on how we as the landlord could support and show tenants that we were a caring landlord by giving advice to tenants on how to maintain and keep their property, offering advice on helping tenants pay their rent; *There were 12 statutory questions in the survey with us looking to add some questions of our own as the survey questions were quite limited. The regulator would get back to us in the summer with the results of the survey;*

The group noted the content of the report.

41. Directorate Report

Directorate report to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on work being undertaken and progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last TSG meeting.

During discussion of this item the following points/questions were raised. (summarised)

- Concerns raised with the backlog of repairs, where were we on this? *Unfortunately, due to storm Eunice we had gone slightly backwards on repairs. There had been a high volume of calls from tenants regarding fallen fences and roofing issues that required repairing. The MD Group had stepped in and helped us out on a number of different work areas. We also had smaller specialists' contractors doing some work for us to help us clear the backlog of repairs;*
- Concerns with rising energy prices and the impact on our tenants going forward. What were our plans for this as a Local Authority in assisting our tenants to access funds to assist them? *We were very mindful of the pressures and cost of living for tenants and the challenges that they may face. In terms of the hardship fund the first tranche to the County Council was 3 million. Confirmation of this would be given once it percolated through to County ; We would then signpost this to tenants to enable them to access funds if they demonstrated hardship through the correct process;*

- Concerns that lights in the communal areas of flats were on constantly, could motion sensor lights be installed to reduce the cost of electricity? Concerns that tenants paid a maintenance charge for these light to be left on from dusk to dawn; *The provision of this would need checking as it may be a requirement in terms of escape that they have to be permanently on. This had not been a priority in the past but would be looked at;*
- Concerns with some homes not having the correct insulation to cut down heat loss; *Our plan was to do a fabric first approach and we think that we could reduce power consumption by two thirds if we did this process successfully which would be a massive reduction on peoples fuel bills. We were also concerned with the high levels of refusals for these improvement works by tenants. Conversations were needed by the group to spread the word around about these improvements;*
- The easiest way to gain access to tenants' properties was to build a relationship with the tenant, not just a stranger turning up on the doorstep. The same person then had to keep returning, it may take three or four visits to build a rapport with the tenant, but this is what was needed to gain entry to a property. Estate open days would also be essential to gain trust of the tenant;
- Concerns with Sheltered Housing Manager/staff not introducing themselves to tenants when they visit. Also concerns that assessments were performed on the phone, not face to face;

The report was noted.

42. **AOB/Actions**

AOB

The Chair announced that he would be stepping down as Chair after the 30 May TSG meeting. He stated that he would still like to sit on the group as a member.

Actions

- Dec packs how we offer to people re disability/ capability/age etc;
- To add total of number of tenants to letting data in performance report
- How many tenants will be picked for telephone survey
- To go back to Paul Cram regarding what we are doing for those tenants that do not use the internet;
- To provide the survey question set to Alex Akhigbemen, how can SWT maintain a tenancy?;
- TSG to visit NT properties in July, September & December;
- Check whether light needs to always be on in communal areas at Kelway Road/motion sensor?;
- Use case studies re: Heat Source Pumps to get tenant's buy-in
- Less visibility of SH & EO's, Ivor Hussey had a particular example, how can we increase this?;
- Election for a new chair;

- Engagement Policy and ICT strategy need to include mention of and alternatives for those not internet savvy, or don't have access (Pam has ICT Strategy and I have engagement policy);

(The Meeting ended at 7.50 pm)

Somerset West and Taunton Council



Tenants' Strategic Group – 30th May 2022

Housing Directorate Compliments & Complaints Annual Review Report

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Housing.

Report Authors: Claire Reed

1.Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

The report is to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on complaints received in the Housing Directorate during 1/4/2021-31/03/2022.

2.Recommendations

The Tenants' Strategic Group is asked to note this report and are invited to ask questions.

3.Full details of the Report

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Complaints and compliments data is reported monthly for the performance scorecard. It is analysed and reported to Housing Senior Management Team (HSMT) and Housing Briefing on a quarterly and annual basis. Regular performance updates are included in our tenant and staff newsletters.
- 1.2 The Housing Ombudsman launched its new Complaint Handling Code in January 2021, with an update in April 2022. The Government also launched its Social Housing White Paper.
- 1.3 The Housing Ombudsman have identified an increase in complaint numbers across the sector during 2021/22, reporting a 104% increase in the number of enquiries and complaints made to them, and an 88% increase in customers requesting formal investigations.
- 1.4 The Council reviewed its Complaints Policy in March 2021, introducing a new two stage complaints process.
- 1.5 At the same time, the Housing Performance team started to oversee, coordinate, respond to and monitor all complaints received by the directorate.
- 1.6 The Housing directorate introduced its own Redress Policy in June 2021 to sit alongside the Council's Complaints Policy. A designated Senior Case

Manager position was put in place in November 2021 to drive complaint performance forward.

- 1.7 A designated Senior Case Manager position was put in place in November 2021 to drive complaint performance forward. The Senior Case Manager is working on several projects designed to further the directorate's complaint performance, in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the White Paper. Work that is currently underway includes:
 - 1.7.1 Exploration of a possible IT software migration across to the new Open Housing system for HRA complaints, to improve efficiency and response times.
 - 1.7.2 A new, housing centric Complaints Policy to align with the Complaint Handling Code, incorporating an improved Stage 2 process which would include a tenant review panel.
 - 1.7.3 Creation of an unofficial 'put things right' stage which will resolve issues for residents quicker and reduce the number of formal complaints raised.
 - 1.7.4 A focus on what we can learn from our complaints and a commitment to action trends that arise.
 - 1.7.5 Creating a comprehensive staff training package to improve complaint management across the directorate.
 - 1.7.6 Recording customer satisfaction through surveys and tenant engagement. Learning from what respondents tell us about how we manage their complaint.
- 1.8 Data in this report is in its infancy, as changes to both the Council Complaints Policy and the way in which complaints are monitored by the Housing team have meant that comparable year on year data is not yet available.

2.0 Compliments

- 2.1 It is important to report on the positive feedback that we receive from our residents, as well as the not so positive. It is a good way of measuring what we are doing really well.
- 2.2 In 2021/22, the directorate received 90 compliments. Most of these were where a member of staff had excelled in the service they have provided to our residents. Some feedback examples received include:

"I'd just like for Nicole recognised for all the hard work she does. She goes above and beyond to help her tenants the best she can, and always does as she says she going to. She also goes to great lengths to make sure the issue is resolved the best it can be."

"I would like to extend my thanks for the work the fencing team have done. The new fence looks lovely and they did a brilliant job as well as being very polite".

“Pippa has been working with us continuously with the most understanding and empathy I have experienced from someone in her position. She has answered my messages in her own time and has checked in on us on her way home after no doubt a long day. I just wanted to let you know that she is doing a wonderful job and I'm so pleased to have dealt with a sympathetic yet professional person”.

2.3 Compliments across each service area can be seen in the following chart:

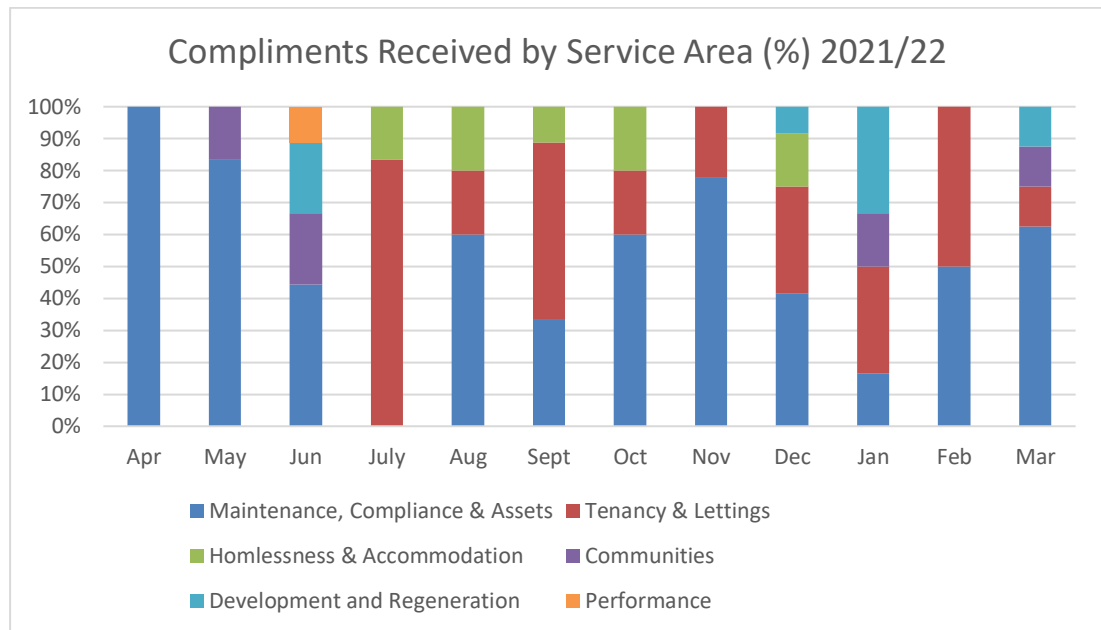


Figure 1: Number of compliments received in 2021/22

- 2.4 Properties (Maintenance, Compliance and Repairs) received the most compliments across the directorate during the financial year.
- 2.5 We are actively encouraging service areas to make sure that we record the great feedback we get from our residents, so that we can report accurate figures going forward.

3.0 Stage 1: Volumes and Response Times

- 3.1 There were 365 complaints closed in total during 2021/22, as follows:
- 331 complaints received at stage 1
 - 34 complaints escalated to stage 2
- 3.2 For stage 1 complaints, this is an increase of just under 10% from the previous year (301 stage 1 complaints closed in 2020/21). Considering the unprecedented numbers recognised by the Housing Ombudsman, this is a reassuring figure although we seek to reduce the number of complaints we receive over the course of the next twelve months.

- 3.3 The chart below shows the pattern of complaints received each month across 2021/22:

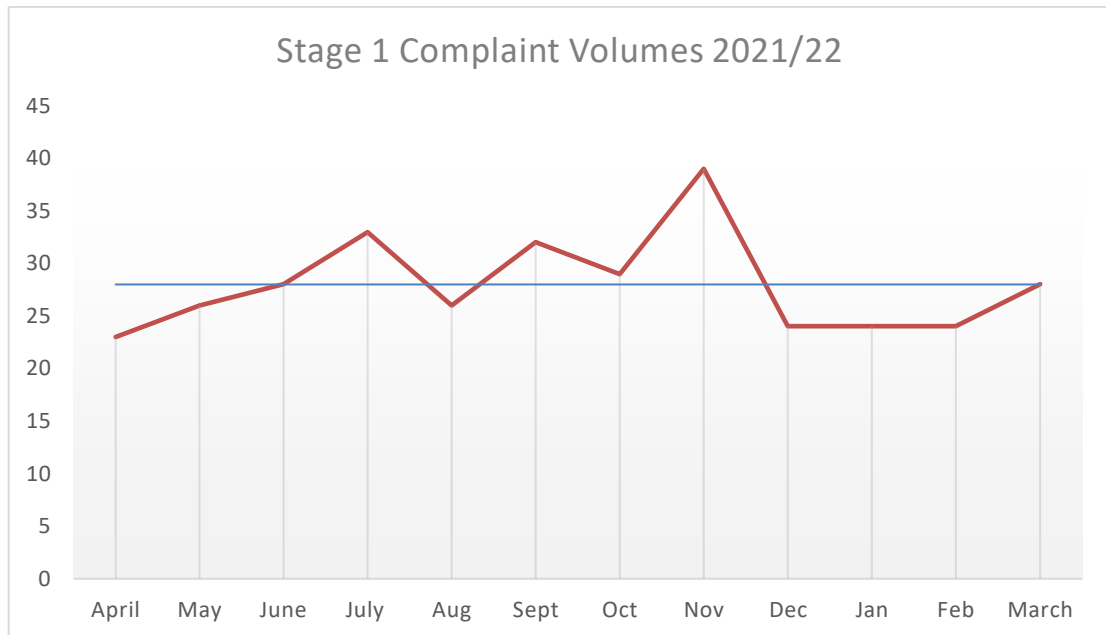


Figure 2: Stage 1 Complaint Volumes 2021/22

- 3.4 The average number of stage 1 complaints received was 28 per month. November saw an unusual peak of complaints, as we received 39 stage 1 complaints in just one month.
- 3.5 23 of the complaints received in November 2021 were to the Properties team. The majority (65%) of these complaints were about responsive repairs.
- 3.6 This spike in figures in November 2021 showed that we had failed to adequately respond to requests for service or repairs. This data confirms what we already knew at that point; that we were managing and working through a backlog of non-emergency repairs brought about by Covid restrictions. We had already taken steps to work with a contractor to clear the backlog of repairs, which in turn reduced the number of complaints in this area.
- 3.7 As a directorate, for the entire year we responded to 68% of stage 1 complaints within the agreed timeframe. Although this figure is lower than we would like, it is reassuring that this has improved since 2020/21 when we responded to just over half (51%) of our stage 1 complaints within standard. We are optimistic that this figure will continue to rise with the hard work that the Housing Performance team and each service area are doing to engage with our residents and improve our complaints handling.
- 3.8 Looking at each service area of the directorate, the Housing team (Tenancy and Estates, ASB, Lettings, Sheltered/Extra Care, Rents) experienced a reduction in the number of complaints made during 2021/22, demonstrated by the trend line on the chart below:

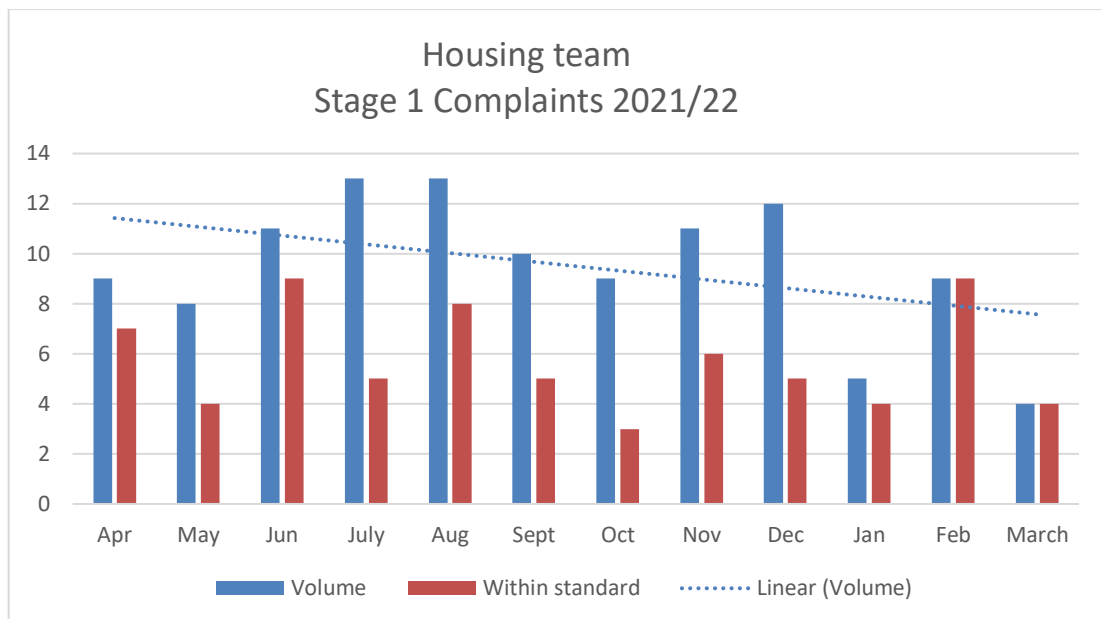


Figure 2: Volume and Response times of Housing team at stage 1, 2021/22

- 3.9 In the Housing team, 61% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days in 2021/22. It is however pleasing to note that response times to complaints against this service area have improved over the course of the year, with 100% of stage 1 complaints responded to on time in February and March. It is hoped that this trend will continue, and it is recognised that the recruitment of a Senior Case Manager has helped to prioritise complaints and bring about improvements in the Tenancy, Estates and ASB teams.
- 3.10 In line with the national figures produced by the Housing Ombudsman, most complaints received by the directorate were made against our Properties team (Maintenance, Compliance and Assets). Complaint numbers in this service area have increased across 2021/22 as demonstrated by the trendline below:

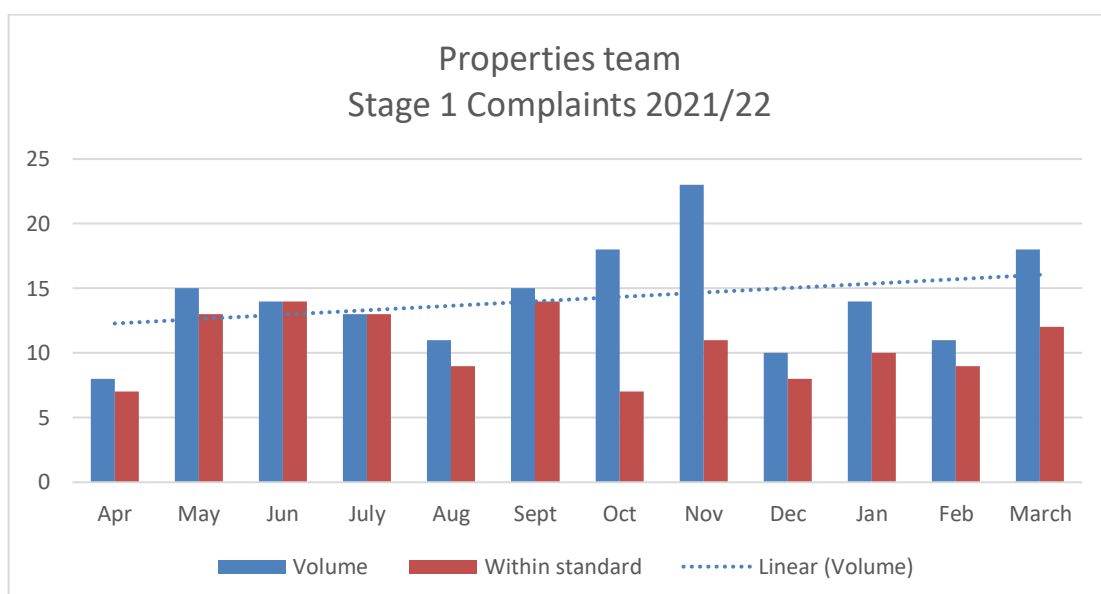


Figure 3: Volume and Response times of Properties team at stage 1, 2021/22

- 3.11 Despite managing the highest number of complaints across the directorate at stage 1, the Properties team successfully responded to 74% of these complaints within the agreed 10 working days across 2021/22.
- 3.12 In more recent months the team has been stretched due to two vacant posts (Responsive Repair Manager and Capital Programme Manager). These managers would ordinarily drive complaint responses in their areas and had previously been responsible for investigating and responding to stage 2 complaints. This lack of resource has inevitably caused a temporary pressure on other housing staff. We recognise that this is an area of vulnerability which we are confident will improve once these roles have been filled.
- 3.13 In the Homelessness and Accommodation team, complaint volumes have also increased over the course of 2021/22, although the volumes in general are lower than other areas of the directorate:

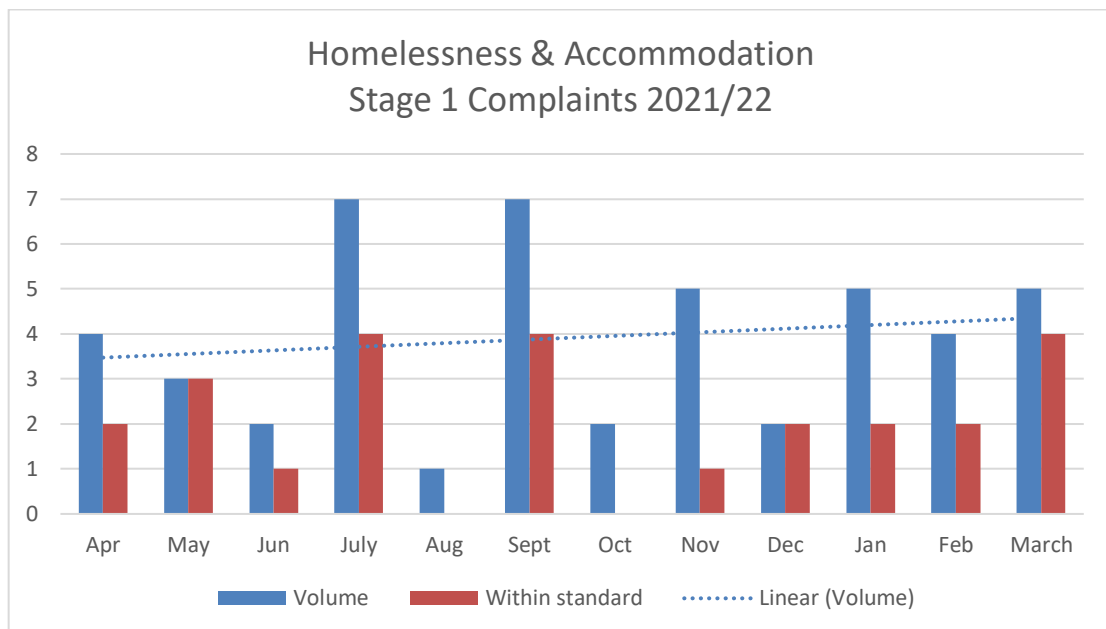


Figure 4: Volume and Response times of Homelessness & Accommodation team at stage 1, 2021/22

- 3.14 The Homelessness and Accommodation team have struggled to achieve a strong response rate (53% within standard) at stage 1. The past few months has seen significant staff changes in the Homelessness and Accommodation team, including a new senior member of staff (Homeless Commissioning and Support Lead) to support the service area. We are optimistic that this will have a positive effect on the team's performance and the response to complaints, as we enter the new financial year.

4.0 Stage 2: Volumes and Response Times

- 4.1 Of the 331 stage 1 complaints closed in 2021/22, 34 moved to the second stage of our Complaints Policy. This indicates that 90% of our customers were satisfied with the action taken and the response they received at stage 1 of the complaints process. We will be looking at recording customer satisfaction

more formally with our residents during 2022/23 to align with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

- 4.2 Over 2021/22, the Housing team received the most stage 2 complaints across the directorate. We recognise that Tenancy, Estates and ASB complaints are often the most complex and emotive, which inevitably gives rise to more challenging complaints; in comparison to repair issues for example which can often be fixed easily. The chart below shows the number of stage 2 complaints received by each service area, by quarter:

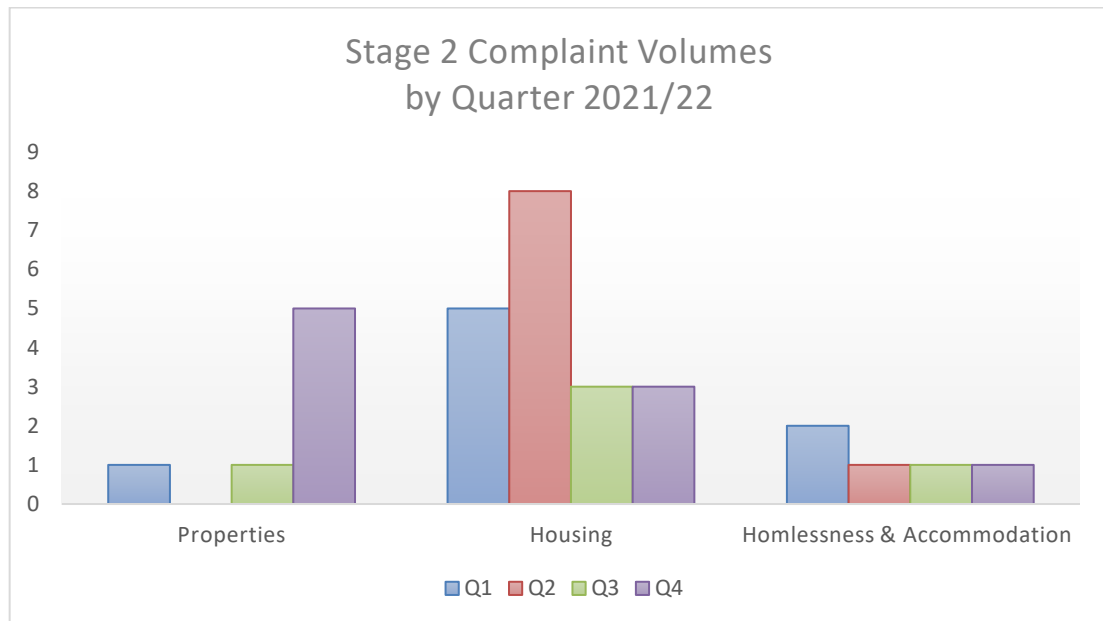


Figure 5: Number of stage 2 complaints received by quarter 2021/22

- 4.3 Note that Properties (Maintenance, Compliance and Assets) received more stage 2 complaints in the final quarter of 2021/22 than any other team. A contributory factor may be the pinch point of staffing issues highlighted above in 3.11. We will dig deeper into stage 2 complaints in the coming months.
- 4.4 Across the directorate, 59% of stage 2 complaints were closed within the agreed policy timeframe of 20 working days. The chart below shows how response rates were split by each service area:

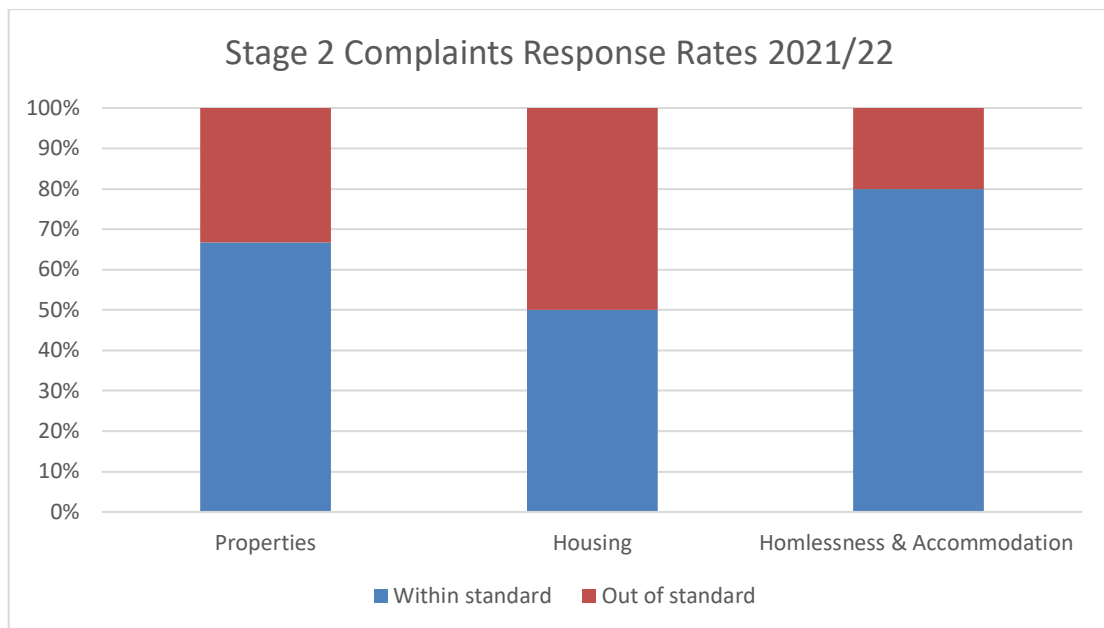


Figure 6: Response times at stage 2 by service area, 2021/22

- 4.5 It is recognised again that the complexity and sensitivity of complaints received by the Tenancy, Estates and ASB teams will often impact on the amount of investigation and actions required at stage 2, to put things right. However, 20 working days (in line with Housing Ombudsman guidance) should allow adequate time for investigation and response to the complaint.
- 4.6 The Performance team have therefore been looking at how this figure can be improved in the short term. The team have increased the one-to-one support given to managers in coordinating and drafting a stage 2 response.
- 4.7 As we are planning to review how stage 2 complaints are approached, (to include a tenant panel in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code), this data will be an important consideration in assessing the most effective way of responding to stage 2 complaints going forward.

5.0 Stage 1: Complaint Outcomes

- 5.1 The chart below shows the percentage of stage 1 complaints that were upheld, not upheld or were partly upheld across the directorate, over the course of 2021/22:

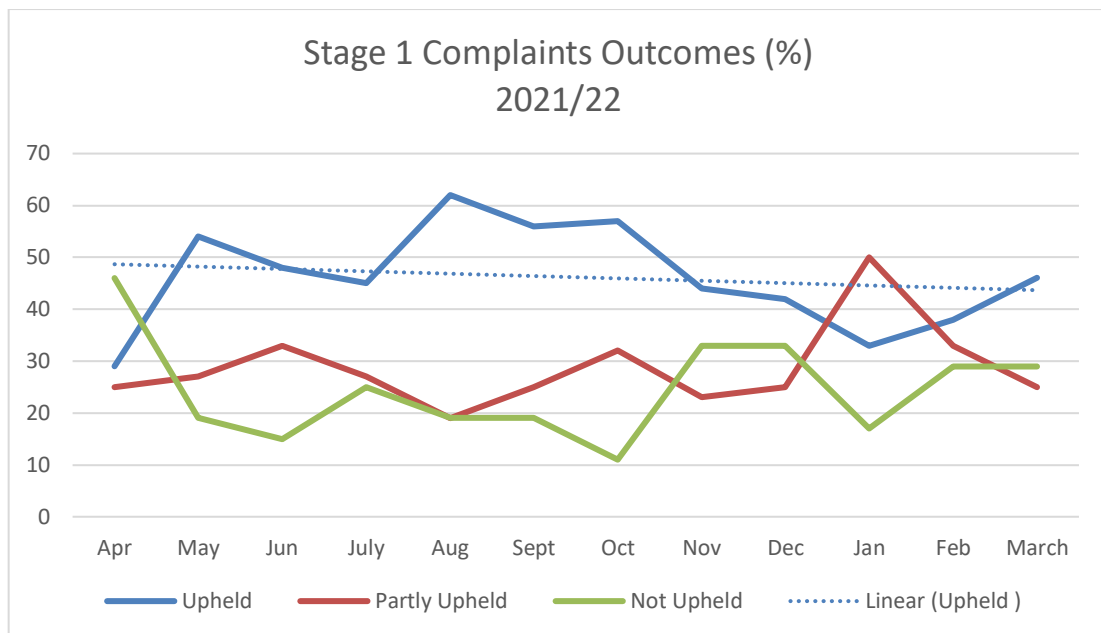


Figure 7: Complaint outcomes by percentage at stage 1, 2021/22

- 5.2 Although the upheld rate is higher than we would like, it is pleasing to note that the trendline for upheld complaints has decreased slightly over the course of the year.
- 5.3 Overall, the Housing directorate upheld almost half of all stage 1 complaints received in 2021/22:

Stage 1 Complaint Outcomes (%)	
Upheld	47%
Partly Upheld	29%
Not Upheld	24%

Table 1: Percentage of complaint outcomes at stage 1, 2021/22

- 5.4 The Properties team upheld 61% of all stage 1 complaints received during 2021/22, compared with 13% in the Homelessness and Accommodation service area:

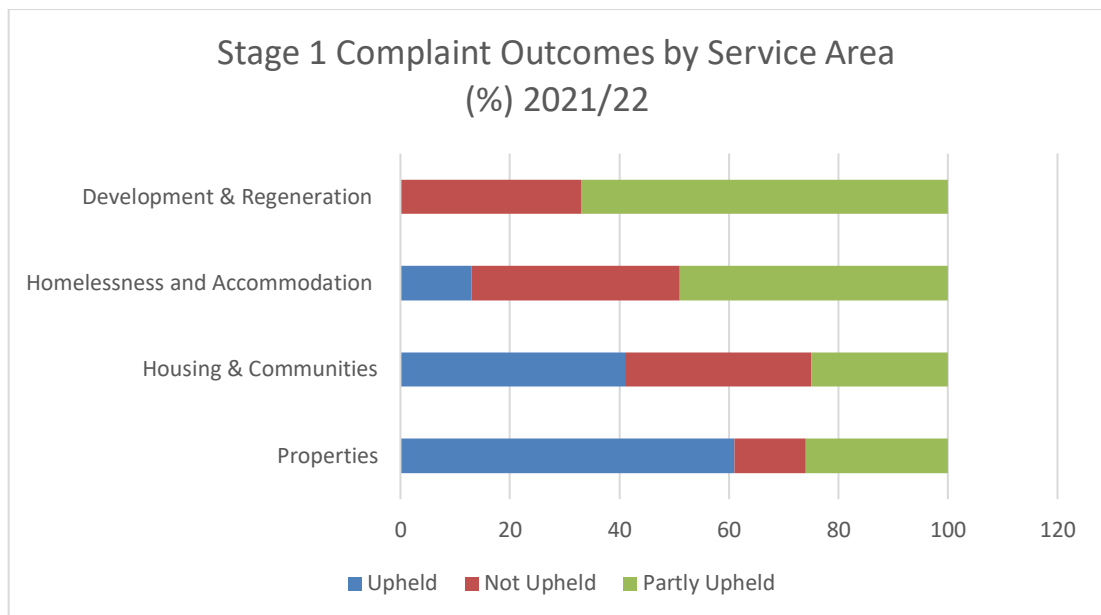


Figure 8: Complaint outcomes by service area at stage 1, 2021/22

5.5 As our data matures, we will consider any trends that demonstrate why a high percentage of complaints at stage 1 have either been upheld or partly upheld during this year. Our initial analysis suggests that both complaints handling and service delivery needs to be improved across the directorate, particularly within Maintenance, Compliance and Assets.

6.0 Stage 2: Complaint Outcomes

6.1 Of the 34 complaints that were escalated to stage 2, almost half were upheld:

Stage 2 Complaint Outcomes (%)	
Upheld	41%
Partly Upheld	32%
Not Upheld	26%

Table 2: Percentage of complaint outcomes at stage 2, 2021/22

6.2 This suggests that it is likely that some stage 1 complaints have been poorly investigated and been closed with the wrong outcome, prompting the complainant to challenge the decision. We recognise that failure to handle a complaint effectively leads to further dissatisfaction and a loss of trust in the service we provide to our residents.

6.3 Some initial analysis indicates that in some cases, our stage 1 response did not address all issues raised by the complainant; or that we had closed the complaint at stage 1 before outstanding issues had been resolved.

6.4 From April 2022, we have started to record where stage 1 decisions have been overturned or partly overturned at stage 2. For future reporting this will provide us with an insight into whether we are getting our responses right at stage 1 and identify areas where this will need improvement.

7.0 Stage 1: Complaint Types and Trends

7.1 The pie chart below shows a breakdown of the complaint types that were received by the Housing directorate in 2021/22:

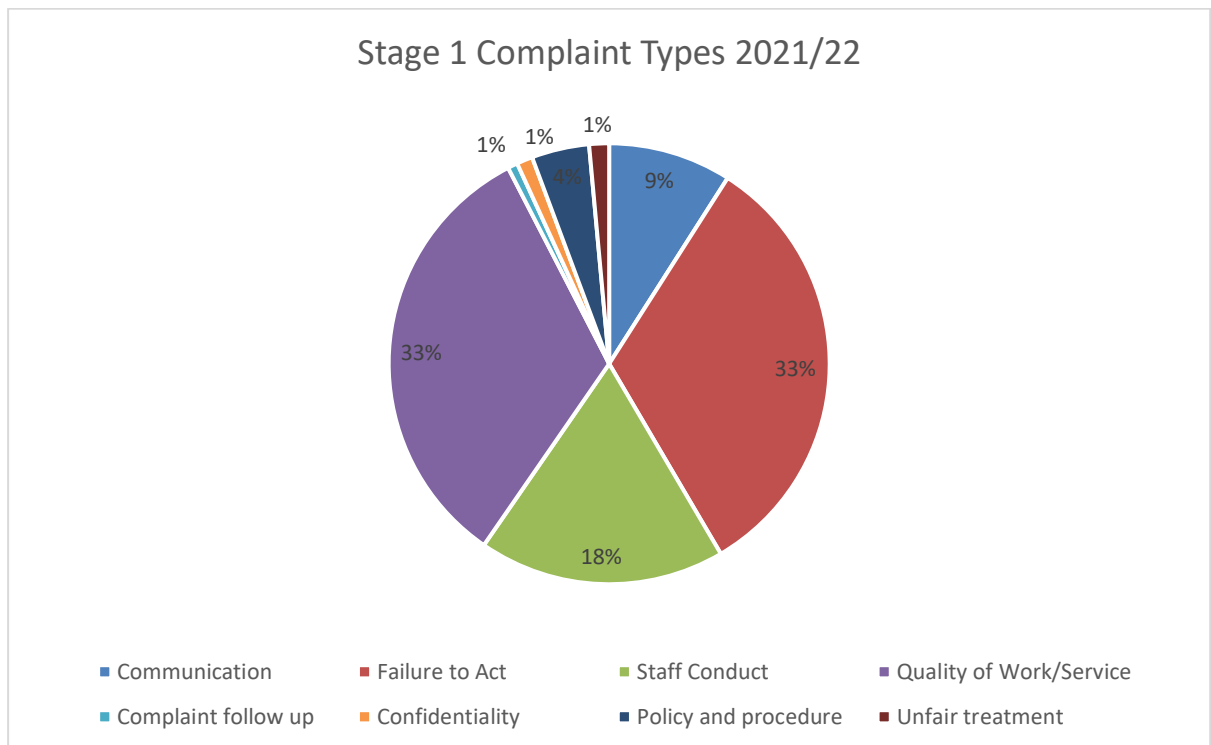


Figure 9: Overall complaint types at stage 1, 2021/22

7.2 When we look at the same data by quarter, the backlog of repairs caused by Covid seems to feature up to the end of quarter 3 in the 'failure to act' category. Complaints about slow service or delays tailed off into quarter 4, which may reflect how the repairs team have managed to catch up and clear the non-emergency repairs backlog. However, there has been an increase in complaints made about the quality of work or service in quarter 4:

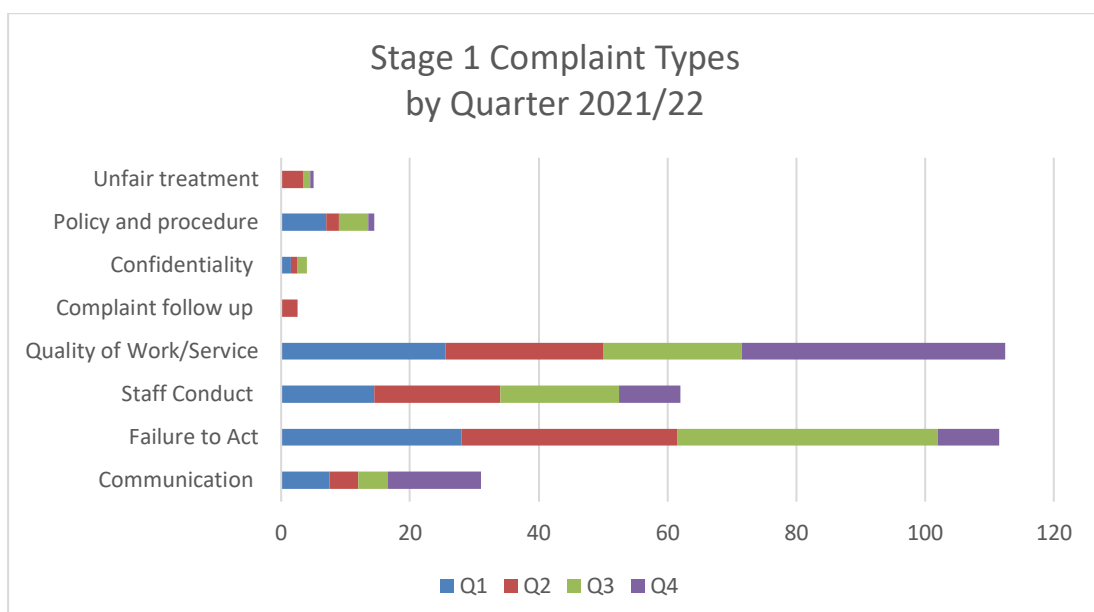


Figure 10: Types of complaints received at stage 1 by quarter, 2021/22

7.3 Failure to act:

The data shows that our residents feel that we don't always respond to their requests for service in a timely manner. A third of all stage 1 complaints received in 2021/22 reported frustrations from our residents in not being able to speak to the person they needed to; not receiving call backs and having to chase repeatedly; or that appointments had been missed more than once.

It may be that the backlog of repairs that were still being felt due to Covid restrictions has had an impact on the directorate's overall figures in this category. Without historic data for comparison, it is difficult to tell at this point. However, the data shows that complaint numbers have tailed off into quarter 4 in this category which is reassuring.

The directorate recently identified that there were a number of open cases in our computer system that had 'slipped through the net' and hadn't been responded to by staff. The Housing Performance team have been working with service areas within the directorate to resolve any outstanding requests or complaints and are taking steps to ensure that contact received by our residents in future is not missed. We are optimistic that this will reduce the number of contacts that a resident needs to make in order for us to address their concern.

7.4 Quality of work or service:

Another third of complainants reported that they were not happy with the standard of work completed (predominantly repairs or planned works) or the standard of the service or advice we had provided across the directorate.

For 2022/23, this figure will be broken down further to identify whether dissatisfaction is greater in the quality of the work we provide, or the customer service we provide.

7.5 Staff conduct:

18% of all stage 1 complaints were concerns about a member of staff or a team's conduct.

A number of these complaints related specifically to driving incidents or inconsiderate parking by Housing operatives when visiting our tenants' homes.

Some complaints reported were when a customer felt like a particular member of staff had been rude, dismissive or hadn't listened to their point of view. In Autumn 2021, the Housing directorate undertook customer care training provide by HQN, and all staff undertook training on how to use unconditional, positive regard.

8.0 Stage 2: Complaint Trends

- 8.1 As mentioned in 5.2, analysis of stage 2 data is in its early form at present. Early indications have highlighted that complaints have been escalated to stage 2 when a complainant has felt that we have failed in our handling of the complaint at stage 1. Notably, that we have not followed through on actions promised in the first complaint response, or that the complaint has been closed prematurely.
- 8.2 Commonly, complaints have escalated to stage 2 because complainants report that we haven't fully addressed all points that had been raised at stage 1.
- 8.3 Complaint handling failures should be an easy issue to resolve with the increasing support that is now being provided by the Housing Performance team through a growing, dedicated Customer Resolution section. The Senior Case Manager is (as mentioned previously) working much closer with staff members tasked with responding to a stage 2 complaint, to ensure all issues are addressed and action plans put in place and then carried out.

9.0 Ombudsman Complaints

- 9.1 During 2022/23, the Housing directorate received and investigated five complaints from the Housing Ombudsman (HO) and one complaint from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).
- 9.2 The Ombudsman cases are shown in the table below:

Ombudsman Complaints		
Ombudsman	Area	Determination
HO	Properties (repairs)	Partial maladministration
	Development & Regeneration	
HO	Antisocial Behaviour (ASB)	Maladministration
HO	Tenancy & Lettings	Reasonable redress offered
HO	Tenancy & Lettings	Reasonable redress offered
HO	Properties (repairs)	Reasonable redress offered
LGO	Homelessness & Accommodation	Partial maladministration

Table 3: Ombudsman determinations in 2021/22

- 9.3 The Housing Ombudsman have published information on their website so that residents can see how their landlord is performing:
- [Landlords Archive - Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://housing-ombudsman.org.uk/)
- 9.4 Housing Ombudsman performance figures for Somerset West & Taunton Council can be viewed on the right-hand side of the above linked page, under 'National landlord report 2020-21'. Because the directorate had fewer than

five determinations in 2020/21, there is not an individual report for our Council.

- 9.5 As mentioned in the introduction, the Housing Ombudsman have reported an increase in the number of investigations carried out during 2021/22. It will be interesting to see if the five Housing Ombudsman complaints we have investigated in 2021/22 aligns with the increase in numbers of escalated complaints that they have reported across the sector for this financial year.

10.0 Conclusion

- 10.1 There have already been definite improvements in the way the Housing directorate has managed complaints in 2021/22. It has been difficult to benchmark how we are performing as the data we have collected so far is immature.
- 10.2 It is encouraging to see that the volume of complaints we have received might not be increasing at the rate the Housing Ombudsman has predicted, and in fact we have started to reduce the number of complaints received in some service areas.
- 10.3 We are beginning to identify trends in our complaints, and from here we recognise some work that we have been doing or can do within the directorate to put changes in place to improve our service delivery. Next steps for the Housing Performance team is to understand the types of complaints received, and work with service areas to embed change, so that we really learn from the feedback we receive from our residents.
- 10.4 It is an exciting time as we start to report on the changes and improvements we are seeing already, and as we start to build a robust approach to Housing complaints.

11. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

A risk assessment is not required to accompany this report.

12: Are there any Finance / Resource, Legal implications directly to do with this report?

There are no financial implications directly to do with the recommendations in this report

13: Are there any Equality and Diversity Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

14: Are there any Data Protection Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

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Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants Strategic Group – 30th May 2022

2021/22 Housing Scorecard Quarter 4

This matter is the responsibility of Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Report Author: Shari Hallett (Housing Performance Manager)

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the housing performance through key performance measures and financial information for the fourth quarter of 21/22 (January to March 2022).

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note content of the housing scorecard for quarter 4 (January to March 2022). The finance report, which has accompanied this report at previous meetings, will be presented to the July 2022 meeting once the accounts for 2021-22 have been closed.

3 Housing Scorecard

- 3.1 The Housing Scorecard is a tool to measure our performance in key areas. The scorecard was presented to Tenants' Strategic Group (TSG) in March 2022 covering the performance in Q3 2021 (Oct-Dec). This report covers the fourth quarter of 2021/22.
- 3.2 Over the last 18 months Covid has had a significant impact on some areas of our performance including backlogs in work, but we can now see a pathway to returning to full and normal service delivery however demands on the service remain high and increasing.
- 3.3 This report covers a total of 18 measures. Customer 5, Rent Recovery 2, Supported Housing 1, Lettings and Voids 1, Housing Repairs 2, Tenancy Management 4, Compliance 2, Development 1.
- 3.4 **Customer**

Ref	Indicator	Target 2021-22	Target 2022-23	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Year to Date
Customer								
HC2	% of stage 1 complaints closed in 10 working days (as per policy)	100%	100%	95%	67%	83%	74%	68.00%

During this quarter there was a notable improvement in complaint response times from last quarter. The 2021-2 average is 68%. Our target is very challenging at 100% when staff vacancies, sickness and volume of complaints continue to affect complaint

response timescales. Efforts continue in earnest in this area. Extensions that are agreed are not reflected in the figures.

During 2022-2023 reporting we will report Housing Revenue complaints performance separate from other areas in line with Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM) guidance. During 2021-2022 we have reported combined performance.

It is worth noting that the volume of complaints has increased across the sector creating further pressure on capacity to respond on time. This year 331 complaints (stage 1) were received, compared to 301 last year. This is a 10% increase in complaint volumes. The Housing Ombudsman report covering 2021-22 shows an increase 104% in the volume of enquiries and complaints compared to the previous year.

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Customer						
% of new tenants satisfied with the lettable standard of the property	85%	82%	93%	84%	100%	96.00%

During January, February and March, satisfaction surveys were conducted with all new tenants. Satisfaction remains high. In the March 2022 meeting of TSG the number of new lets each month was requested alongside this satisfaction percentage.

January: 24 properties let (15 survey responses): 93% satisfaction

February: 19 properties let (19 responses): 84% satisfaction - Note 16 tenants “very satisfied”; however, 3 were not satisfied due to heating issues that have now been resolved.

March 16 properties let (11 responses): 100% satisfaction

The 2021-22 average for this indicator is 96%

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Customer						
% of tenants satisfied with most recent repair	85%	78%	85%	91%	92%	91%

We continue to use an electronic questionnaire sent to customers of our Repairs service as soon as the repair completes.

Satisfaction with repairs will form part of the pilot Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey completed in May 2022 on the telephone with customers to provide further data on this indicator.

At the Tenants’ Strategic Group meeting in January, we were asked to specify numbers of surveys going out and responded. This data was discussed fully in the March meeting, and it was decided that surveys would continue to be sent, although statistically this is a low sample and not sufficiently indicative. New software will be sourced once Open

Housing is live, with consideration given to digitally excluded customers and how surveys may be able to be completed on the handheld devices of trade staff.

In January 2022 282 surveys were sent, with 25 responses received giving an 85% satisfaction rate. In February 2022 247 surveys were sent, with 23 responses received giving a 91% satisfaction rate. In March 2022 301 were surveys sent, with 42 responses received giving a 92% satisfaction rate. The 2021-22 average for this indicator is 91% satisfaction.

Results returned indicate that we are exceeding target for our levels of satisfaction where surveys are completed (it is acknowledged that not all tenants are currently receiving surveys as it is restricted to mobile users with access to internet via their phone). However, it is encouraging to note that those who choose to respond are responding positively.

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Customer						
Number of compliments received	n/a	n/a	7	4	9	89

We have been receiving a steady number of compliments and the total for the year is 89.

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Customer						
Overall tenant satisfaction (STAR results)	82%	81%	83%	83%	83%	83%

Our STAR survey during November/December 2020 recorded 83% tenancy satisfaction overall. This is an improvement on our satisfaction rating recorded in 2018 which was 81% and exceeds the target of 82%. Two years ago, our target was to improve satisfaction and we have achieved that in our latest survey. The 2021-22 average remains at 83% and we will survey again during May 2022 and six months after.

3.5 Rent Recovery

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Operations						
Rent Recovery						
Income collected as a % of rent owed excluding arrears brought forward	99%	98%	97.16%	99.41%	103.64%	99.86%
Total number of all evictions	n/a	n/a	0	1	1	4

The performance is back on target by March 2022, where rent collected has exceeded the rent billed for that month. Rent arrears at the end of March 2022 were reported as £681k. The 2021-22 average is 99.86%

There have been 4 evictions from April 2021-March 2022 all are due to rent arrears.

3.6 Supported Housing

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Operations						
Supported Housing						
Sheltered housing - % of tenants receiving annual reviews of support plans	100%	99%	98.0%	97.2%	97.1%	98.60%

Our performance continues at just below 100% reporting 97.1% for March (this shortfall represents 26 tenancies). The 2021-22 average is 98.6%. Our shortfall this year has been largely due to high levels of sickness (much of which was Covid related). We are confident that vulnerable tenants are receiving regular contact based on a current assessment of their need.

3.7 Lettings and Voids

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Operations						
Lettings and Voids						
Average re-let time in calendar days (key to key)	44	48	46.1	53.3	43.5	52.48

This performance indicator is widely used by housing providers, and the target has been set to reflect national best practice however many providers are reporting increasing voids turnaround times. There remains a higher proportion of major voids (which are properties requiring extensive work prior to relet).

We are pleased to report that our plans to improve turn-around times has brought us back to target performance by March 2022. We remain under continued pressure depending on numbers of void properties coming through during the month. The 2021-22 average is 52.48% due to the challenges reported during the year.

3.8 Housing Repairs

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Operations						
Housing Repairs						
Completion of housing emergency repairs within 24 hours	100%	95%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100%

The 2021-22 average is 100%.

Data for this indicator is taken from Open Contractor software system (which is used to hold repair jobs against the core property database). As previously reported, this data

is unfortunately not currently available for non-emergency repair reporting purposes. Data and software changes are being implemented to enable accurate reporting of this non-emergency repair indicator.

3.9 Tenancy Management

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Operations						
Tenancy Management						
Total new ASB cases in the month (TSM NM01)	n/a	n/a	4	7	11	88
Total number of ASB cases that were closed in the month	n/a	n/a	31	1	24	107
Number of ASB cases open on the last day of the month	n/a	n/a	39	45	32	567
Number safeguarding referrals	n/a	n/a	1	0	2	13

ASB - These figures represent “high level” ASB cases opened and closed in the month. We are content with our performance in this area but ideally would like the numbers to be as low as possible. The year-to-date figure of new cases totals 88.

Safeguarding – We currently raise low numbers of safeguarding referrals to Somerset County Council. This quarter we have made 3 referrals. Where we do have concerns, we will frequently help to address these through a multi-agency approach to provide the required support and interventions to the affected households. Awareness and training in the Council has taken place to ensure that all incidents are identified and managed within policy. The year-to-date figure of safeguarding referrals is 13.

3.10 Compliance

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Operations						
Compliance						
% of housing dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate (LGSR)	100%	n/a	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100%
% of housing communal areas with a valid electrical safety certificate (EICR)	100%	n/a	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	99.80%

We are pleased to report 100% compliance in these areas. The 2021-22 average is 100%, the 2021-22 average for electrical safety certificates is 99.8%.

3.11 Development

Indicator	Target 2021-22	Amber Threshold	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021-22 Average/Total
Operations						
Development						
Number of SWT HRA new home completions since April 2019	1000 by 2049	20 per year	62	62	62	62

62 new homes have completed since April 2019, the performance indicates this cumulative number of homes built. Contractors are now onsite delivering 47 new properties in North Taunton. In June 2021 planning permission was secured for 54 new homes at Seaward Way in Minehead and we started on site January 2022.

Democratic Path:

- Portfolio Holder -
- Tenants Strategic Board – 30th May 2022

Reporting Frequency: Quarterly

Contact Officers

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Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – May 2022

Directorate Report

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Housing.

Report Authors: Assistant Directors and Housing Performance Manager

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

The report is to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on work being undertaken and progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last TSG meeting in September 2021.

2. Recommendations

The Tenants' Strategic Group is asked to note this report and are invited to ask questions.

3. Background and Full details of the Report

Housing Development and Regeneration Team

HRA New Homes, Housing Strategy and Housing Enabling

- North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) Phase A is progressing with the first couple of completions due in Summer followed by small numbers of units later in the year. Equans/Engie continue to work well on site. Phase B is now vacant, and progress is being made steadily on phase Ci although mutual terms are not currently agreed on one private landlord property. The team are recruiting to replace Mary Bryce who retired in March. Equans are presenting their contract proposal for phases B and Ci in May to the Council and SWT will then consider if the proposal is value for money and manages risk. Phase E has received planning permission approved and the specification for the new build should be finalised with procurement commencing.

- The 54 home zero-carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead, commenced in January. The zero-carbon exemplar scheme which has been featured as a case study in the Good Homes Alliance good practice guide will be complete by October 2024.
- The service still awaits decisions in relation to planning applications for the zero carbon affordable housing schemes, on various sites in Taunton. These schemes include a phosphate mitigation strategy which is supported by Natural England and the Environment Agency. If the mitigation strategy is approved by the local planning authority the approach could be repeated and create sufficient phosphate credits to support circa 1000 new homes.
- The service is progressing at pace a low carbon retrofit strategy and delivery plan. The strategy will be considered by the Council late 2022/2023 however the principles will influence a significant SWT Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 2 grant application. SWT has been awarded SHDF Wave 1 funding to support a low carbon retrofit of council homes. The three pillars of the emerging strategy are engaging and supporting our customers, fabric first and then, over time, replacing fossil fuels with renewable heat and power provided via onsite, communal, or grid-based systems. The relationship between fuel poverty and low carbon retrofit will be explicitly considered within the strategy.
- New affordable housing in the district has seen a higher-than-average number of properties completed this financial year. The pipeline of new units is currently at its strongest in the west of the district, which is unaffected by the phosphate mitigation planning requirements.
- The Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy and delivery plan was approved by Full Council in October and Officers are supporting the delivery of new homeless bedspaces through several partners and direct council supply. The council has been awarded £750k through the government Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme to accelerate the new provision Round three and has submitted a Round 4 bid for three schemes.
- The Housing Enabling team are preparing the district for the impact of First Homes which is a government initiative to increase low-cost home ownership.
- We continue to deliver the Hinkley Point C Housing Programme, working with partners to drive forward 11 key areas of work. This programme is providing new bed space in the district and support to vulnerable customers affected by the change in the housing market because of the uplift of workforce at HPC. An action plan is being developed with the Stogursey Parish Council and the housing service receive funds to support its Home Moves initiative. The service has appointed the Citizens Advice Service to extend its debt and money management service throughout the district and increase its outreach work.

Housing Property Team

Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs

- Emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs are being undertaken.
- Emergency jobs are being delivered within our defined timescale (24 hours from logging).
- There is a small backlog of non-emergency jobs, although this has reduced considerably, following the use of external contractors. Procurement of longer-term external support via MD Group is progressing and is due to commence in June 2022.
- Void repairs to meet our Lettable Standard remains a challenge, although performance is improving in this area. Again, we are looking to utilise MD Group to support on undertaking some of our Major Voids (those with two or more key elements required).

Property Safety Compliance

- All property safety compliance checks and works continue to be undertaken. These include gas safety checks (LGSR's), water risk assessments and remedial works, electrical inspections (EICR's), asbestos surveys and re-inspections, fire risk assessment and remedial works, fire safety checks, and lift and stair-lift checks and remedial works.
- An accelerated programme, using further additional contractors, to undertake outstanding electrical inspections (EICR's) and associated remedial works continues.
- Property safety compliance procurement remains busy, including a new longer-term electrical inspection and remedials tender, and extending required contracts for 2022/23 to take us through to LGR.
- Weekly compliance and additional review meetings are being held to carefully monitor and manage all these safety critical areas.

Capital Programmes

- A number of capital work programmes are on-site, including kitchen and bathroom replacements, re-roofing, and fire safety works (replacement fire doors and emergency lighting).
- Procurement activities also continue, including review of required capital programme works needed to meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS), as well as our Retrofit aspiration.
- Recruitment for the vacant role of Capital Programme Manager is underway.

Asset Management

- Following go-live of the Open Assets module of our Capita software system, post go-live work is now underway, although some of this is dependent upon the Open Housing implementation to go-live in June 2022.

- Accelerated programmes of Stock Condition Surveys and Energy Assessments continue to take place.
- Capital work programme planning (for both the 2022/23 financial year and forward plans) is being undertaken, including (as mentioned above) both DHS and Retrofit.

Housing and Communities Team

Supported Housing (extra care and sheltered)

1. The officer team continues to be impacted by Covid, so delivery has concentrated on key tasks:
 - The sign-up of new tenants.
 - Supporting tenants who are returning home from hospital.
 - Health and safety compliance checks at our two extra care schemes including: Kilkenny Court and Lodge Close.
 - Carrying out “trusted assessor” visits for those vulnerable tenants who are in urgent need of aids and adaptations to support them within their home.
 - Carrying out health and safety checks at sheltered housing schemes.
 - Responding to general customer enquiries reported via the service’s Firmstep computer system; and
 - Responding to Deane Helpline issues where the tenants have not responded to their usual monitoring call out.
 - The team have been piloting a new way of working with Somerset County Council to improve joined up working. The pilot project provides greater and easier access to information on the tenants' officers are supporting as well as sharing selected information on tenants that would be useful to practitioners in the wider Early Help System. It is very early days, however, feedback from officers to date has been positive.
 - The team have recently taken part in a training session enhancing their awareness on a range of early interventions when responding to incidents of neighbour nuisance and or anti-social behaviour reported by tenants.

Lettings

- The total number of new lettings for April 2021- March 2022 = 350.
- The % of new tenants satisfied with the lettable standard of a property for April 2021- March 22 = 96%.
- The team have been fully engaged in configuring the new Open Housing Management System and undertaking testing in readiness for going live with the system in June 2022. Part of the team’s work in preparation for the launch has been to review their operation procedures. All this work is progressing well to date; and
- After having undertaking new system training and awareness sessions the team are involved in piloting a new way of working with Somerset County Council to improve joined up working. The pilot project provides greater and

easier access to information on the applicants' officers are considering for vacant council housing. It is very early days, however, feedback from officers to date has been positive.

Income

- The rent recovery case managers and the Debt and Benefit officers are working hard with tenants to ensure they are receiving the correct benefits and those that are being financially impacted by the current situation are claiming any grants or accessing funds they are entitled to claim.
- The team continue to push the lettings of garages. There are several voids especially in the Priorswood area, we do have a plan we are working on to reduce the numbers.
- One of the Rent Recovery case managers who was on secondment to another team has now been successful in securing that role permanently. The Rent Recovery role is being covered by agency staff at this time, however we will now start the recruitment process to fill this role.

Tenancy/Estates & ASB

- The teams are continuing to remain stable and settled. Although we have been affected by COVID this has been managed as best we can.
- We have now scheduled all blocks, estates and skip days for the coming year and these will be published in the tenants' newsletters and on our website.
- We are still seeing overall a drop in complaints within Tenancy.
- Teams are also managing their Firmstep enquiries and have made a real effort not to allow these cases to become overdue.
- As we move into Spring/Summer we are now experiencing more ASB cases, and we are closely managing these. We will monitor closely the impact and the causes of ASB incidents that are reported into the service.
- Our response to youth gang culture is ongoing. We have had some serious incidents recently of "youth gangs" causing ASB and criminal activity. We are working with the Police and partners can take swift legal action against any breaches of tenancy agreements involved.
- The team has also drafted up a new Tenants Handbook and this is currently being circulated for comments/amendments.

Housing Performance Team Housing Performance Team (Shari Hallett)

- We continue to support the work of the Tenants Strategic Group and Tenants' Action Group on the 12th May 2022 we are also holding a joint tenant meeting with Homes in Sedgemoor.
- The Tenants' Action Group have awarded £16,000 from their Child and Youth Initiative Fund.
- A "kiosk" (screen with internet access) has been funded and installed in the Priorswood Community Centre. A further kiosk has been ordered for the Link Centre at Halcon.

- The damp and mould group for tenants continues to meet and make progress.
- The tenants' spring newsletter has been posted to Tenants.
- Internally we continue to support the meetings that provide us good governance of our activities e.g., programme meeting, performance meeting, risk meeting, etc.
- Our assessment against the white paper continues.
- We are collectively working with Homes in Sedgemoor on local government reorganisation workstreams.
- The policy review work with the HQN (Housing Quality Network) is underway and TSG members will receive revised policy documents.

4. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

A risk assessment is not required to accompany this report.

5. Are there any Finance / Resource, Legal implications directly to do with this report?

There are no financial implications directly to do with the recommendations in this report

6: Are there any Equality and Diversity Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

7. Are there any Data Protection Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

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