



Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report

1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015

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Introduction

This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2014/15 under the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the procedure). The purpose of the report is to identify topics and trends in relation to complaints; identify areas of organisational learning that have taken place over the past year as a result of the complaints received and make further recommendations based on trend data to improve services. The report also highlights any areas of good practice and seeks to identify topics and trends in relation to comments made by members of the public so that the Council can take action where appropriate to improve services.

In addition to the statistical information presented in this report it is important to recognise the work of the Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team that underpins this in terms of promoting an organisational culture in which complaints are recognised, accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. This also enables the Council to collect accurate information on complaints in order to identify topics and trends and improve services accordingly.

Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

The procedure sets out how the Council will deal with complaints, compliments and comments received about the Council as a social landlord (as well as in respect of its ownership and management of leasehold housing).

The procedure has three stages. Stage 1 is a local resolution stage where we try to resolve those complaints that cannot be resolved immediately as part of our day to day business. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with locally, that is within the service being complained about. We aim to resolve the majority of complaints at Stage 1 of the procedure.

Stage 2 is a formal investigation stage where complaints will usually be investigated by the Complaints and Information Governance Manager or another officer independent of the service being complained about.

Stage 3 is a mandatory stage between the Council and the Housing Ombudsman. This is referred to as the 'designated person' or 'democratic filter'. The designated person or democratic filter can be an MP, a local Councillor or a recognised Tenant Panel. This has to be decided locally and should be agreed as part of the Council's local offer with the Tenants' Board. In Darlington it was agreed with Jenni Chapman MP, Councillor Copeland, as the relevant portfolio holder, and the Tenants' Board that this function would be performed by a recognised Tenant Panel (from here onwards referred to as the Tenants' Complaints Panel).

Should a tenant remain dissatisfied with the Council's response to their complaint, they will be required to refer the matter to the Tenants' Complaints Panel. The Tenants' Complaints Panel may help resolve the complaint directly, refer the

complaint to the Housing Ombudsman or decide to do neither. If the Tenants' Complaints Panel decides not to take any action the complainant will be entitled to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman directly. The complainant will also be able to approach the Housing Ombudsman directly in cases where eight weeks have elapsed since the Council's response to their complaint at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Public Information and Accessibility

We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible we have produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.

Information is available on the Council's website which contains an electronic form people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.

The Complaints and Information Governance Manager can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

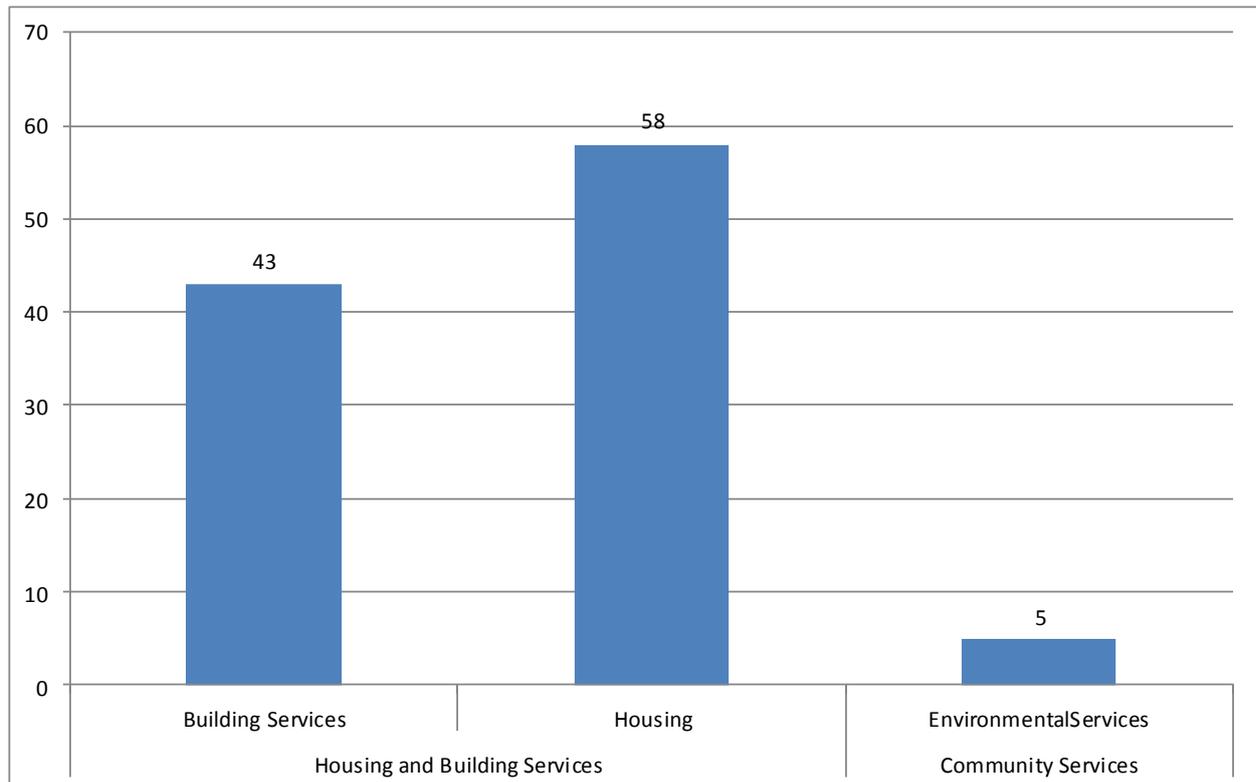
Complaints Information and Organisational Learning

Overview of Complaints, Compliments and Comments

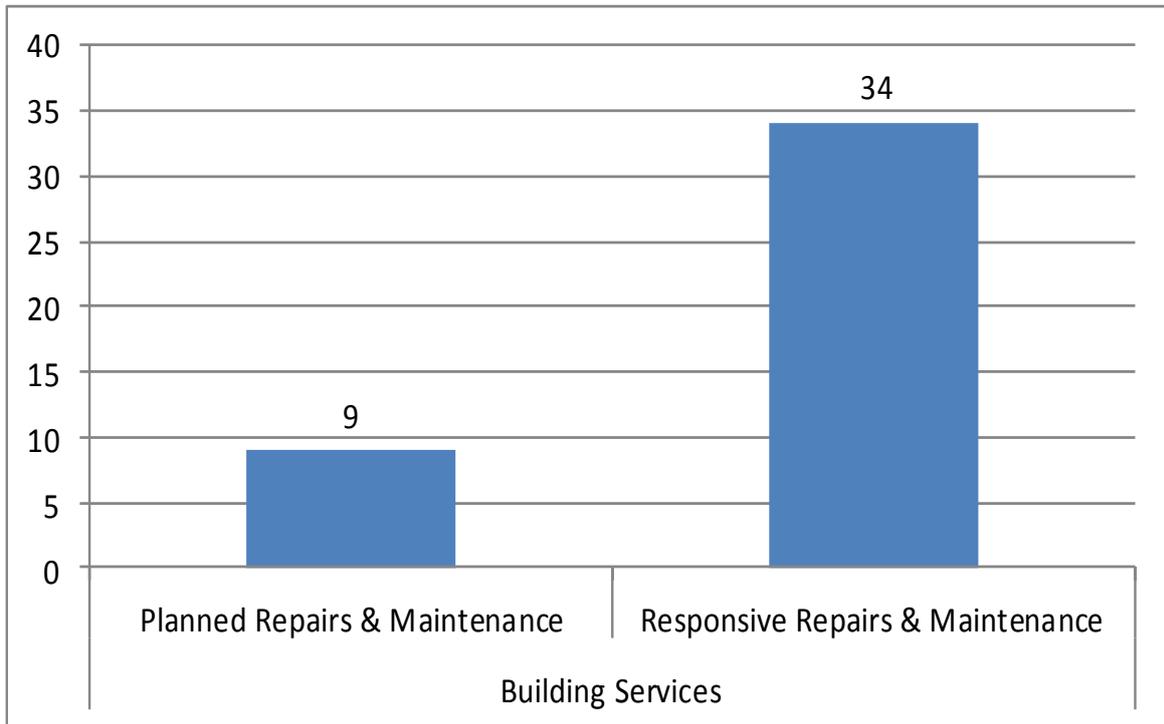
Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015 the Council received a total of 106 complaints under the procedure compared to 101 in 2013/14. A total of 13 complaints were investigated at Stage 2 of the procedure. 12 were escalated to Stage 2 following the Stage 1 investigation and one was considered directly at Stage 2. Two complaints were escalated to Stage 3 of the procedure following the Stage 2 investigation. The Council also received 47 compliments under the procedure compared to 49 in 2013/14 and 9 comments compared to 8 in 2013/14.

A breakdown of the total number of complaints received by service is provided below.

Complaints by Service - Housing & Building Services



Complaints by Team – Building Services

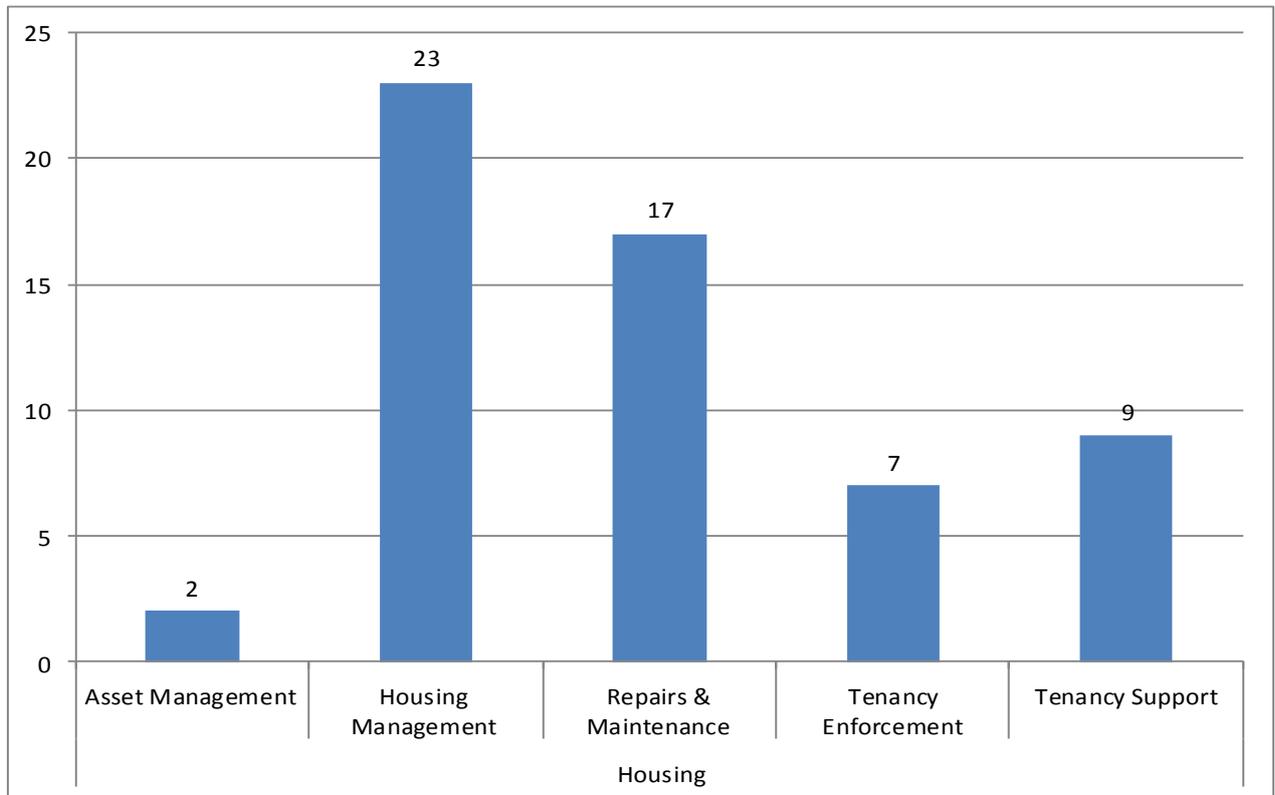


The most common cause of complaint remained delays in undertaking, the quality of and communication in relation to responsive repair work.

Complaints by Team - Environmental Services

Five complaints were received for Grounds Maintenance; these concerned the standard of works undertaken.

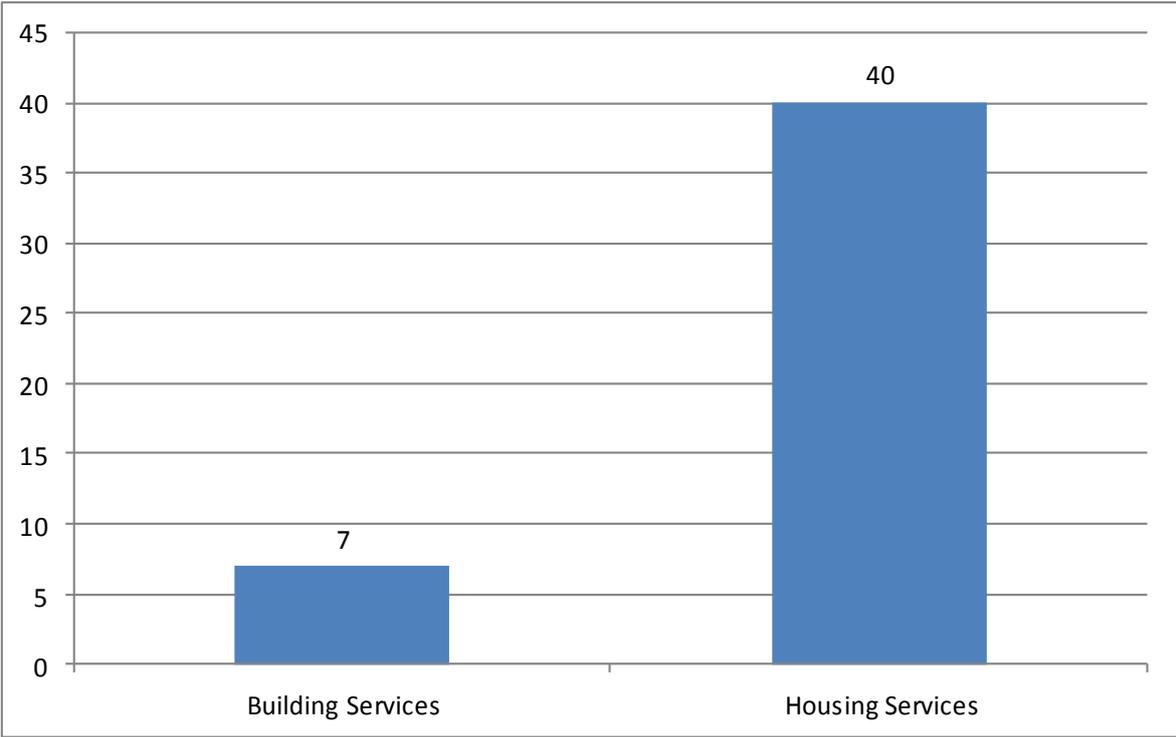
Complaints by Team - Housing Services



Four complaints for Housing Management were about miscalculation of rent, there were no other discernable themes.

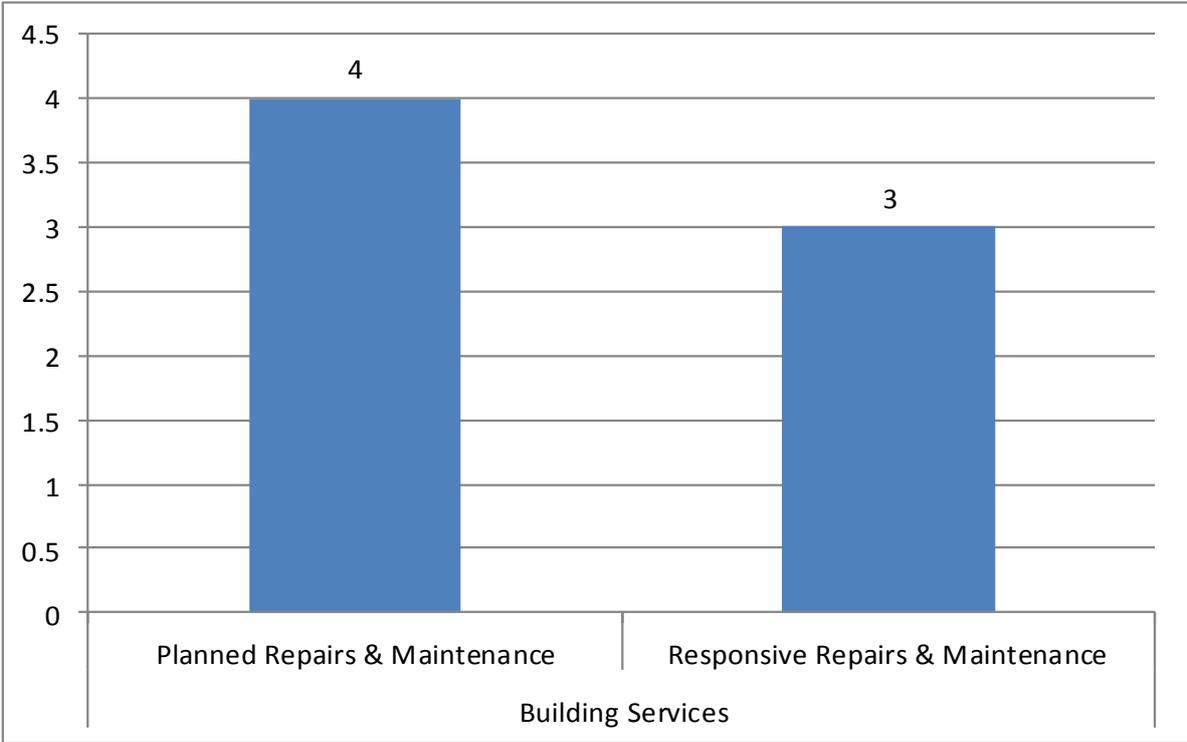
The most common cause of complaints for Repairs & Maintenance were also delays in undertaking, the quality of and communication in relation to repair work. These complaints primarily relate to services provided by external contractors.

Compliments by Service – Housing & Building Services

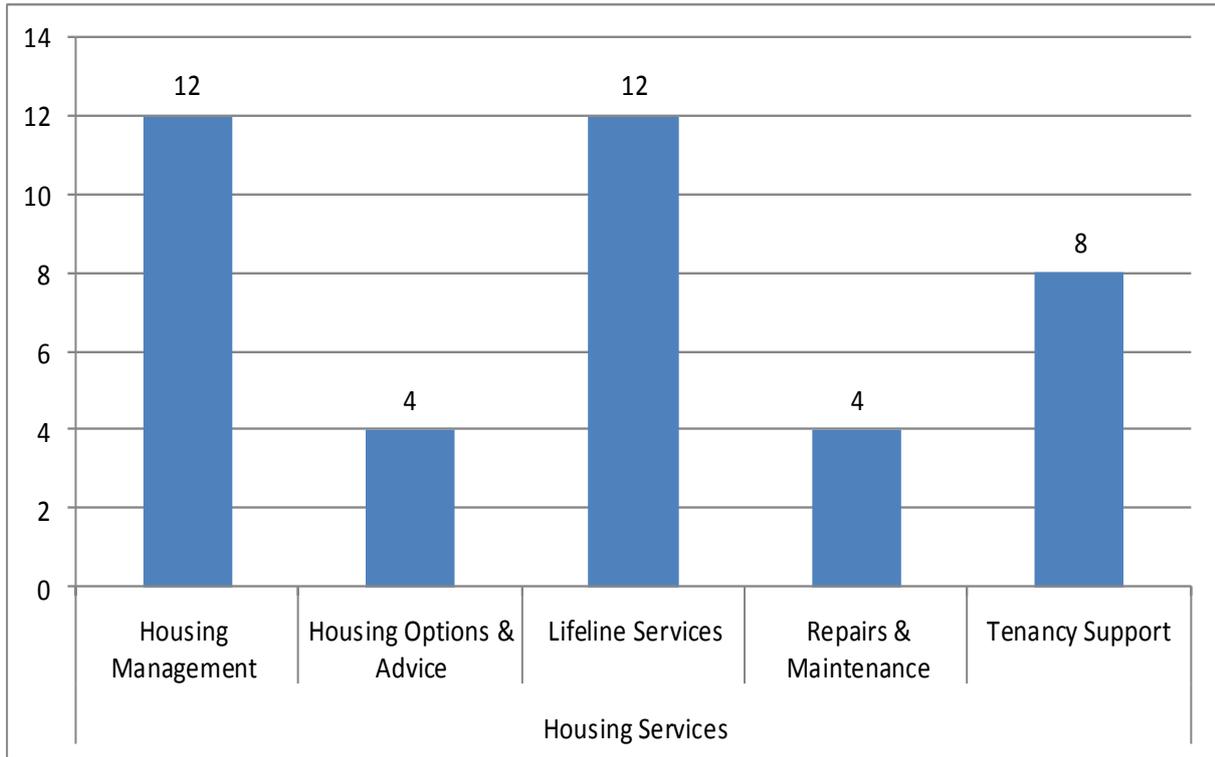


Compliments were primarily for the level of service provided and the friendly and helpful attitude of staff.

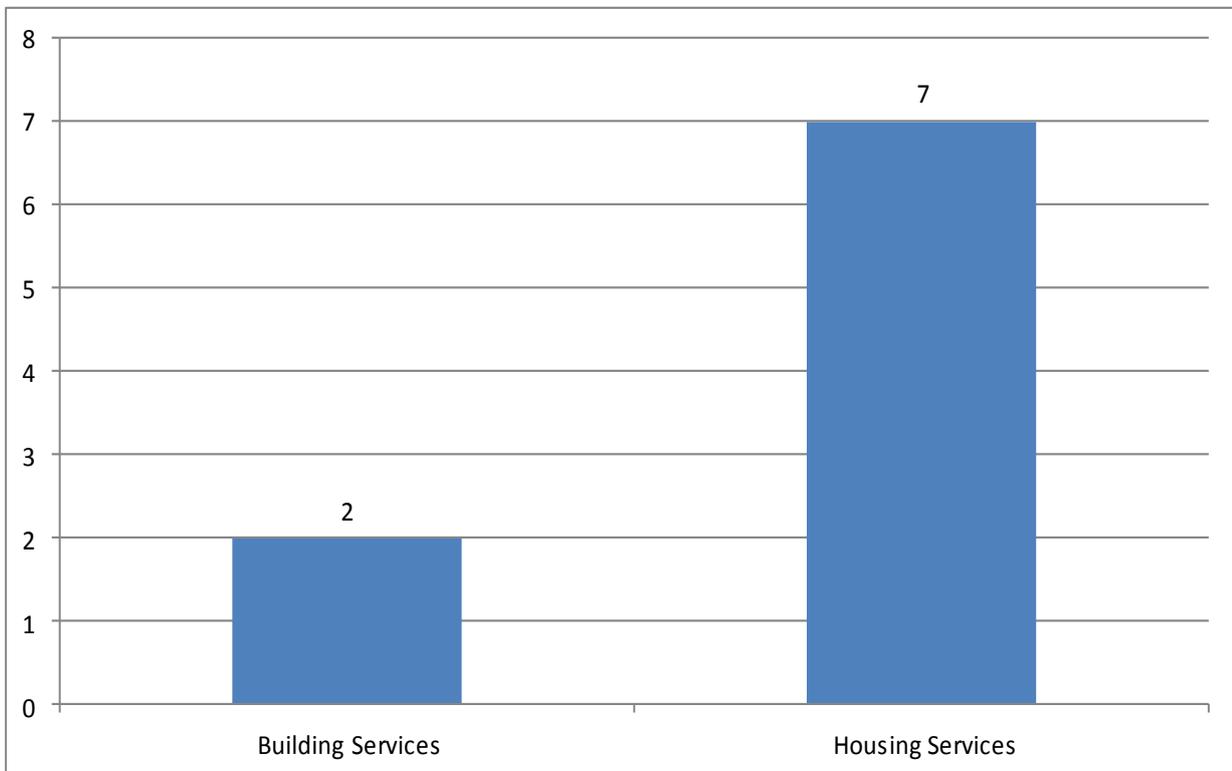
Compliments by Team – Building Services



Compliments by Team – Housing Services

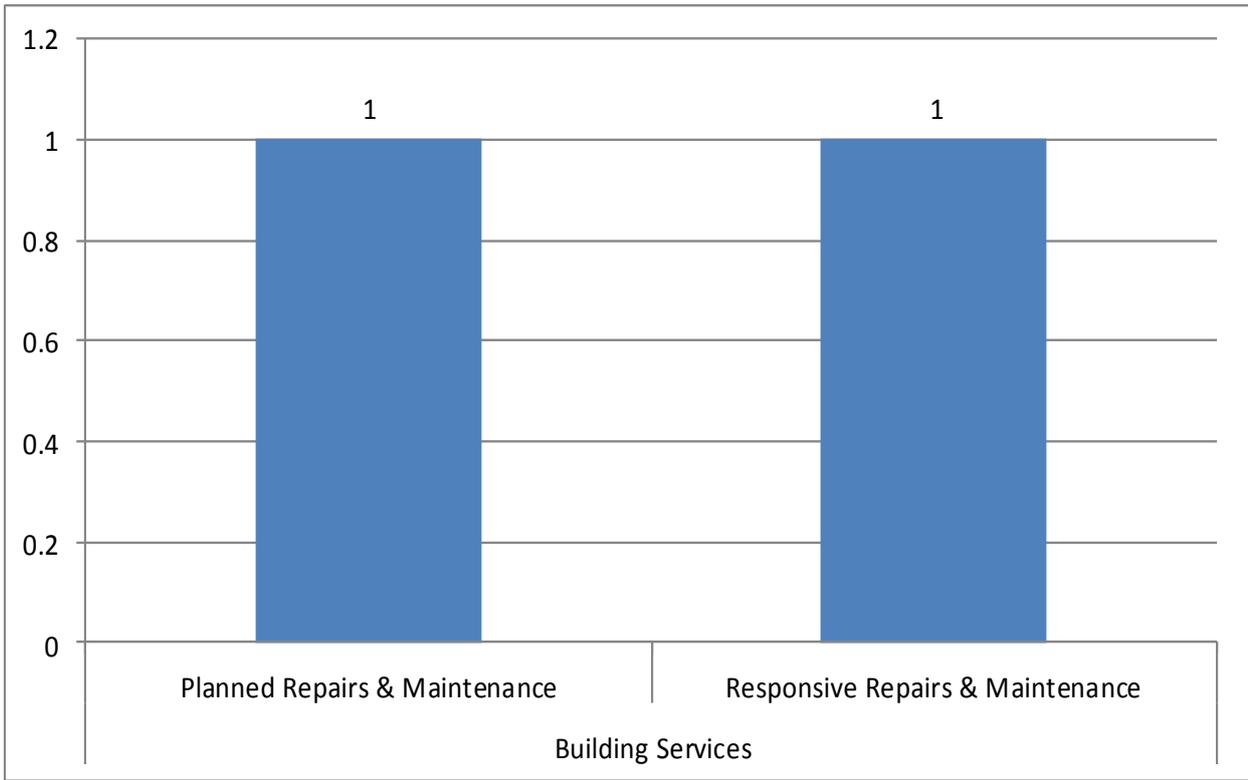


Comments by Service - Housing & Building Services

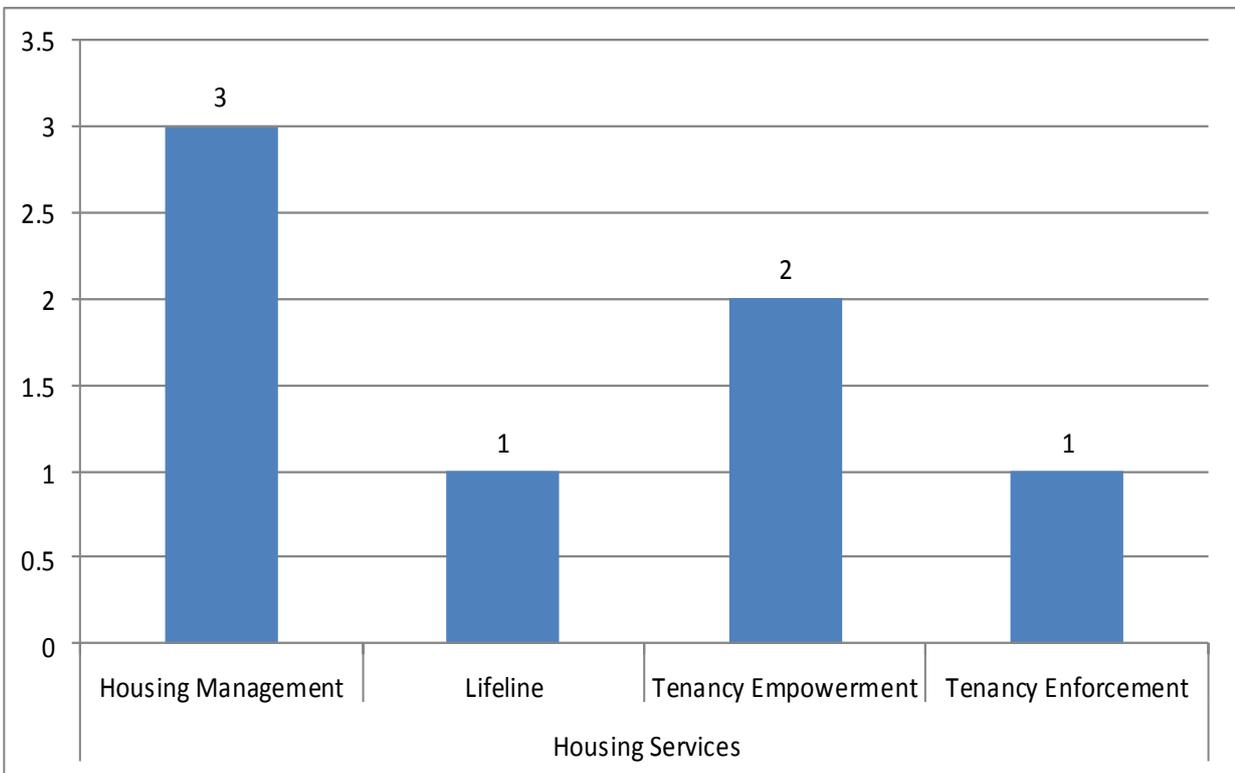


There were no discernable themes in the comments received for Housing & Building Services.

Comments by Team - Building Services

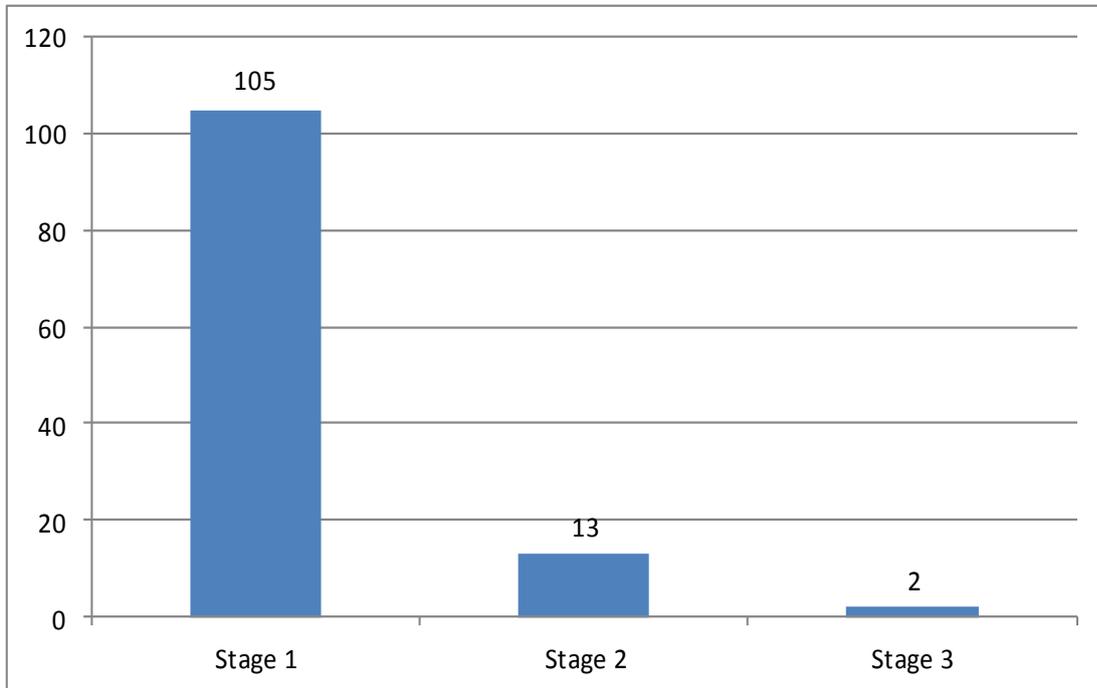


Comments by Team – Housing Services



Complaints by Stage

The below graph shows the number of complaints received at each stage of the procedure during 2014/15.



Complaints by Outcome

The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2013/14.

Stage 1

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Neighbourhood Services & Resources	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Environmental Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grounds Maintenance	0	0	0	4	0	4
Total for Grounds Maintenance	0	0	0	4	0	4
Total for Environmental Services	0	0	0	4	0	4
Total for Community Services	0	0	0	4	0	4
Housing & Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Planned Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	1	4	1	6
Total for Planned Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	1	4	1	6
Responsive Repairs & Maintenance	0	2	0	14	2	18
Total for Responsive Repairs & Maintenance	0	2	0	14	2	18
Total for Building Services	0	2	1	18	3	24
Housing Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asset Management	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total for Asset Management	0	0	0	1	0	1
Housing Management	1	2	4	7	3	17
Total for Housing Management	1	2	4	7	3	17
Repairs & Maintenance	0	3	2	5	0	10
Total for Repairs & Maintenance	0	3	2	5	0	10
Tenancy Enforcement	1	0	1	0	1	3
Total for Tenancy Enforcement	1	0	1	0	1	3
Tenancy Support	1	0	3	1	1	6
Total for Tenancy Support	1	0	3	1	1	6
Total for Housing Services	3	5	10	14	5	37
Total for Housing & Building Services	3	7	11	32	8	61
Total for Neighbourhood Services & Resources	3	7	11	36	8	65
Total	3	7	11	36	8	65

Stage 2

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Neighbourhood Services & Resources	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housing & Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Planned Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total for Planned Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	0	1	0	1
Responsive Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	1	1	0	2
Total for Responsive Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	1	1	0	2
Total for Building Services	0	0	1	2	0	3
Housing Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	1	1	1	3
Total for Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	1	1	1	3
Tenancy Support	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total for Tenancy Support	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total for Housing Services	0	0	2	1	1	4
Total for Housing & Building Services	0	0	3	3	1	7
Total for Neighbourhood Services & Resources	0	0	3	3	1	7
Place	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housing & Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Building Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Service and Repairs	0	0	0	1	0	1
Gas Technician	0	0	0	1	0	1
Plasterer	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total for Service and Repairs	0	0	0	2	1	3
Total for Building Services	0	0	0	2	1	3
Housing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housing	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total for Housing	0	0	1	0	0	1
Housing Assets	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total for Housing Assets	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total for Housing	0	1	2	0	0	3
Total for Housing & Building Services	0	1	2	2	1	6
Total for Place	0	1	2	2	1	6
Total	0	1	5	5	2	13

Stage 3

The Tenants' Complaints Panel determined two complaints during 2014/15.

Having considered the first complaint the Panel concluded that the Council had acted reasonably and fairly in considering the complaint and that the complainant should accept the resolution offered by the Council. The Panel decided not to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman.

Having considered the second complaint the Panel concluded that the Council had acted reasonably and fairly in considering the complaint. As the complainant remained dissatisfied the Panel referred the matter to the Housing Ombudsman.

Housing Ombudsman

The Housing Ombudsman determined one complaint during 2014/15. Their decision was, *'Not Upheld: No Maladministration'*.

Organisational Learning

All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, several service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2014/15. Some examples of these are detailed below.

Following a complaints for Planned Repairs and Maintenance and Responsive Repairs and Maintenance the Complaints Manager reminded Building Services staff of the need to ensure complaints are dealt with in accordance with the Council's Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure.

Following another complaint for Responsive Repairs and Maintenance it was agreed all operatives (including new starters) would be made aware of our procedure for replacing door locks by including it as a regular agenda item at our Tool Box Talks and including it in inductions.

Following a complaint for Housing Management refresher training on the void management process was provided for Housing Management Officers.

Following a complaint for Repairs and Maintenance it was agreed that we would write to all those affected by works to boundary fences prior to works commencing.

Following a complaint for Tenancy Support refresher training to remind staff of the notice period required to terminate a tenancy was provided.

Further Recommendations

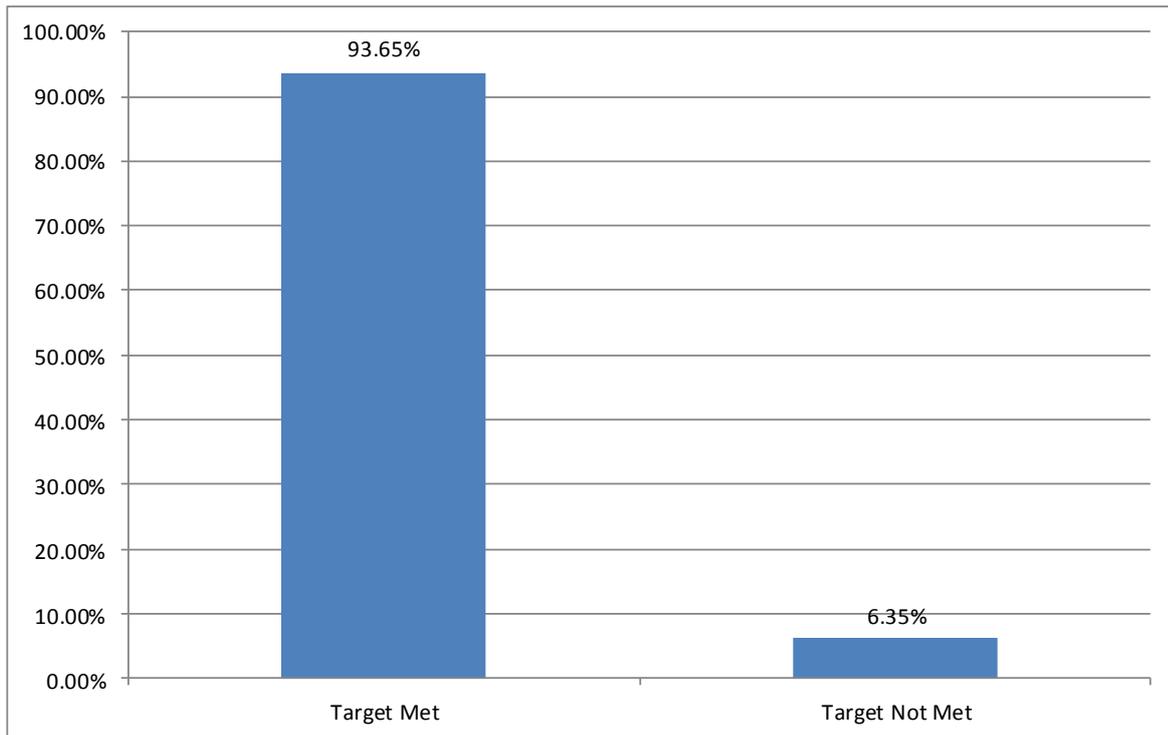
The timeliness of responding to complaints in accordance with the procedure should be addressed with Housing and Building Services staff.

Performance against the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

The below graphs show performance in relation to those complaints acknowledged and responded to during 2014/15.

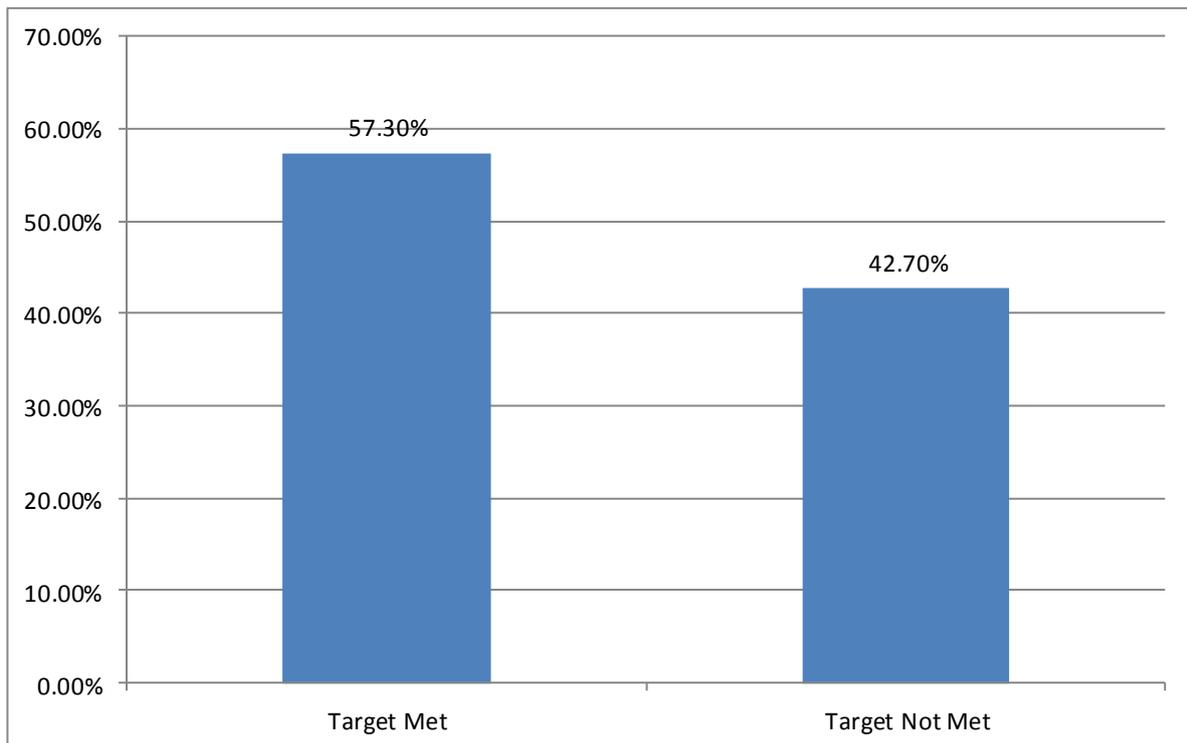
Stage 1

Performance against Stage 1 acknowledgement target (3 working days)



This is an increase from 91.40% in 2013/14.

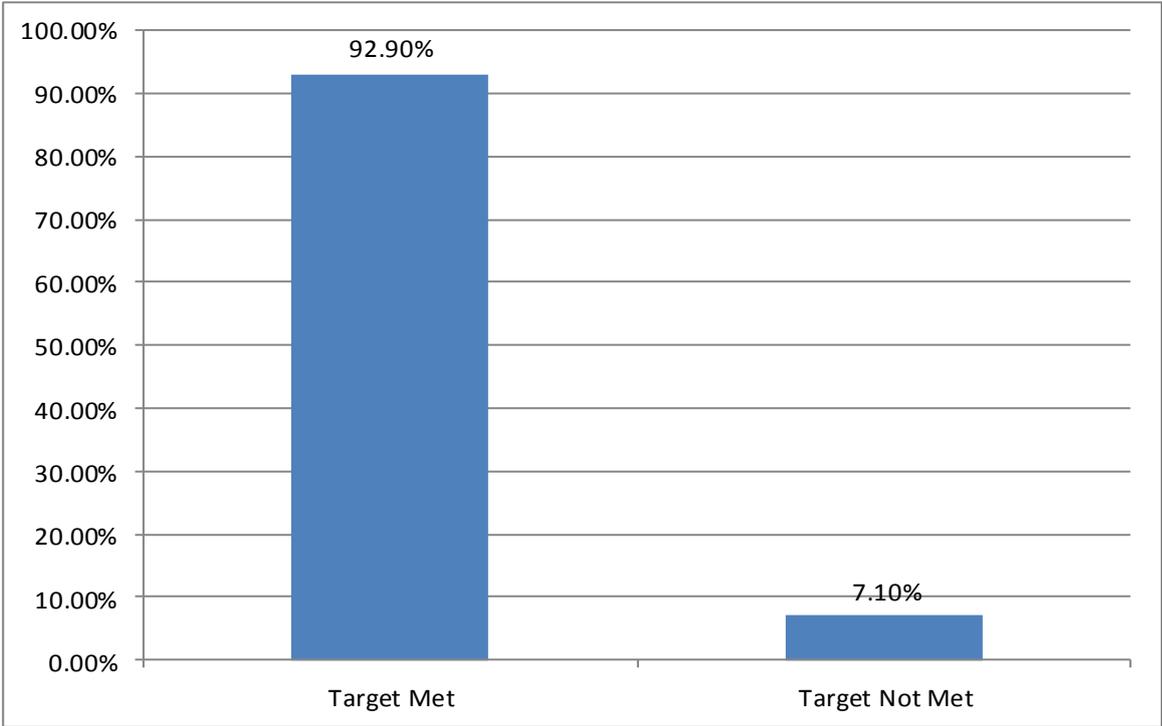
Performance against Stage 1 response target (20 working days)



This is a decrease from 64% in 2013/14. While it is important that officers work to the timescales it is recognised that this is not possible in all cases and that process should not necessarily come before successfully resolving the matter to the complainant's satisfaction. Where it is not going to be possible to meet the timescale, in accordance with the procedure, the responding officer should agree an extension with the complainant and maintain a dialogue throughout the course of the investigation.

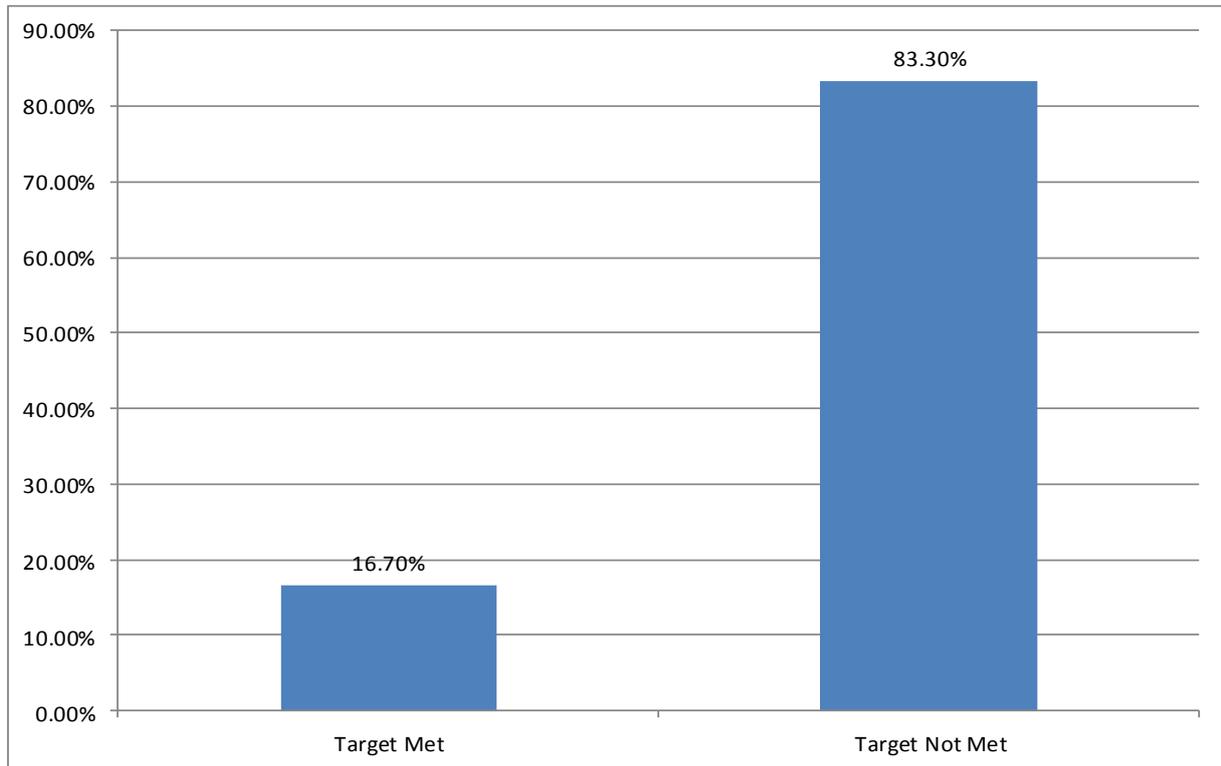
Stage 2

Performance against Stage 2 acknowledgement target (3 working days)



This is an increase from 91.70% in 2013/14. One complaint was not acknowledged within timescale.

Performance against Stage 2 response target (25 working days)



This is a decrease from 20% in 2013/14. The delays in responding were primarily as a result of the high volume of complaints received following the introduction of Alternate Weekly Collections (see *the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2014/15*) and the subsequent increase in the number of stage 2 complaints the Council's received (A further 99 Stage 2 complaints were investigated under the Council's Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure). In the majority of cases where it was not going to be possible to respond within timescale an extension was agreed with the complainant in accordance with the provisions of the procedure.