



# **DARLINGTON**

Borough Council

## **Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2020/21**

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## **Introduction**

1. This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2020/21 under the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the corporate 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 those areas of good practice within the Council and seeks to identify topics and trends in relation to comments made by members of the public so the Council can also take action where appropriate to improve services.
2. In addition to the statistical information presented in this report it is important to recognise the work of the Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team that underpins this in terms of promoting an organisational culture in which complaints are recognised, accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently and as close to the point of service delivery as possible.

## **Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure**

3. The corporate procedure sets out how the Council will deal with all complaints, compliments and comments received with the exception of those received in relation to adult and children's social care services, social housing, public health and Members which will be dealt with under separate procedures.
4. The corporate procedure has two 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 corporate procedure.
5. Stage 2 is a formal investigation stage where complaints will usually be investigated by the Council's Complaints Investigator, the Complaints and Information Governance Manager or another officer independent of the service being complained about.
6. If the complainant remains dissatisfied following a Stage 2 investigation they may refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

## **Public Information and Accessibility**

7. 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.

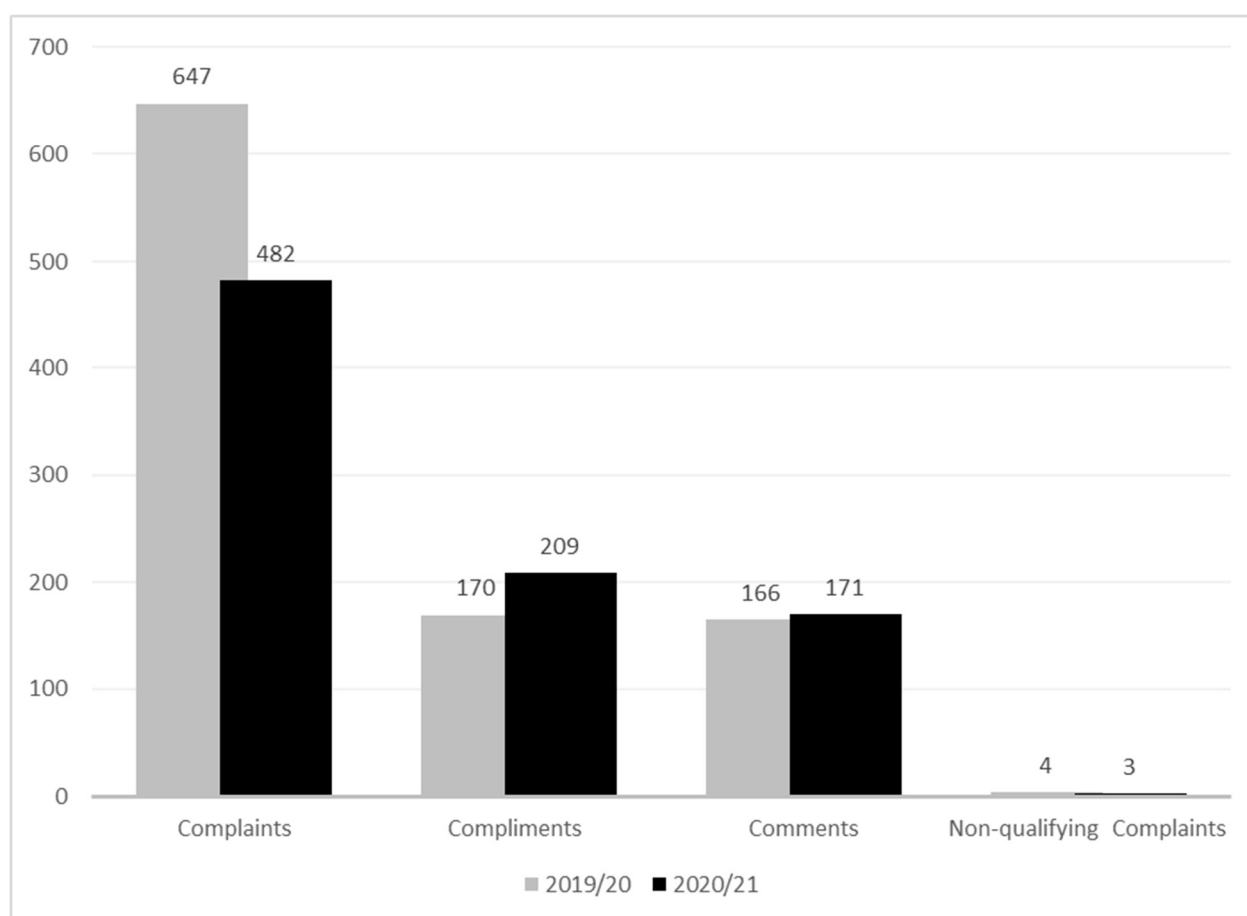
8. Information is available on the Council's website which contains an electronic form people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
9. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

## Complaints Information and Organisational Learning

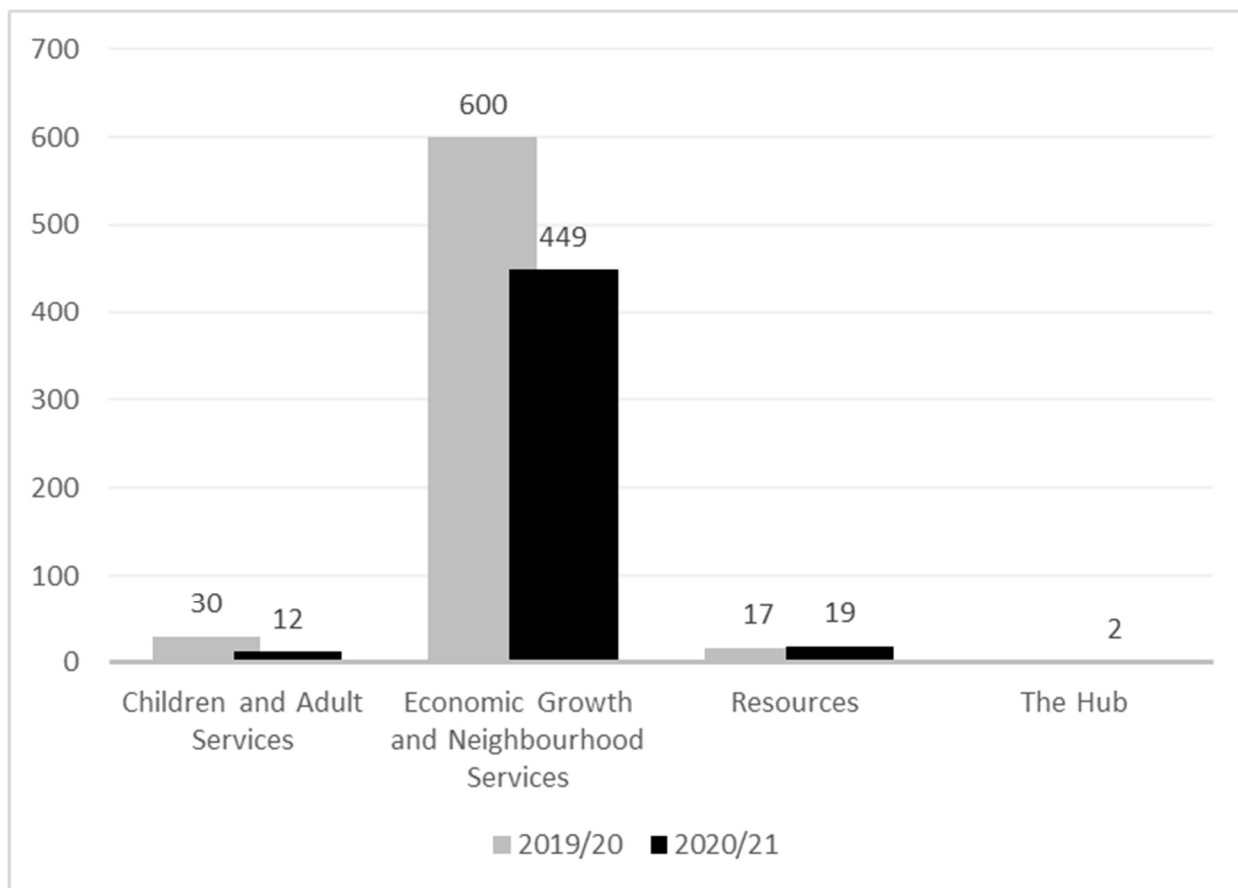
### Overview of Complaints, Compliments and Comments

10. Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 the Council received a total of 865 representations under the corporate procedure, a decrease from 987 in 2019/20.
11. The Council received 482 complaints, a decrease from 647 in 2019/20. 457 complaints were initially dealt with at Stage 1 of the corporate procedure, whilst 24 were initially dealt with at Stage 2. One complaint was sent directly to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman who made a decision without referring the complaint to the Council in the first instance. 26 Stage 1 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 following a Stage 1 investigation. In total 50 complaints were investigated at Stage 2, a decrease from 59 in 2019/20.
12. The Council received 209 compliments, an increase from 170 in 2019/20.
13. The Council received 171 comments, an increase from 166 in 2019/20.
14. The Council also received three non-qualifying complaints, a decrease from four in 2019/20.

### Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments



### Complaints by Department



*N.B. Comparison data is not available for The Hub which was set up in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

15. Children and Adult Services received 12 complaints, a decrease from 30 in 2019/20.

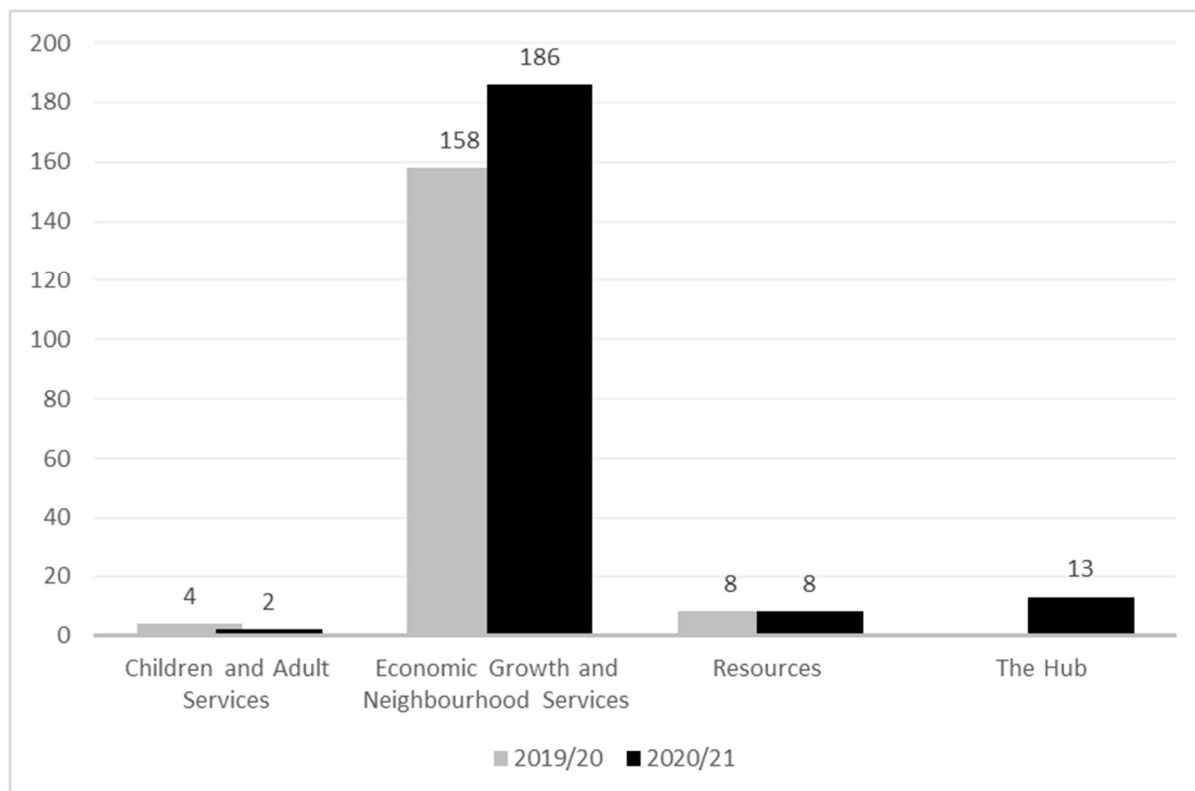
*N.B. The majority of complaints about Children and Adult Services are detailed in either the Children's or Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2020/21.*

16. Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services received 449 complaints, a decrease from 600 in 2019/20.

17. Resources received 19 complaints, an increase from 17 in 2019/20.

18. The Hub received two complaints.

### Compliments by Department



*N.B. Comparison data is not available for The Hub which was set up in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

19. Children and Adult Services received two compliments, a decrease from four in 2019/20.

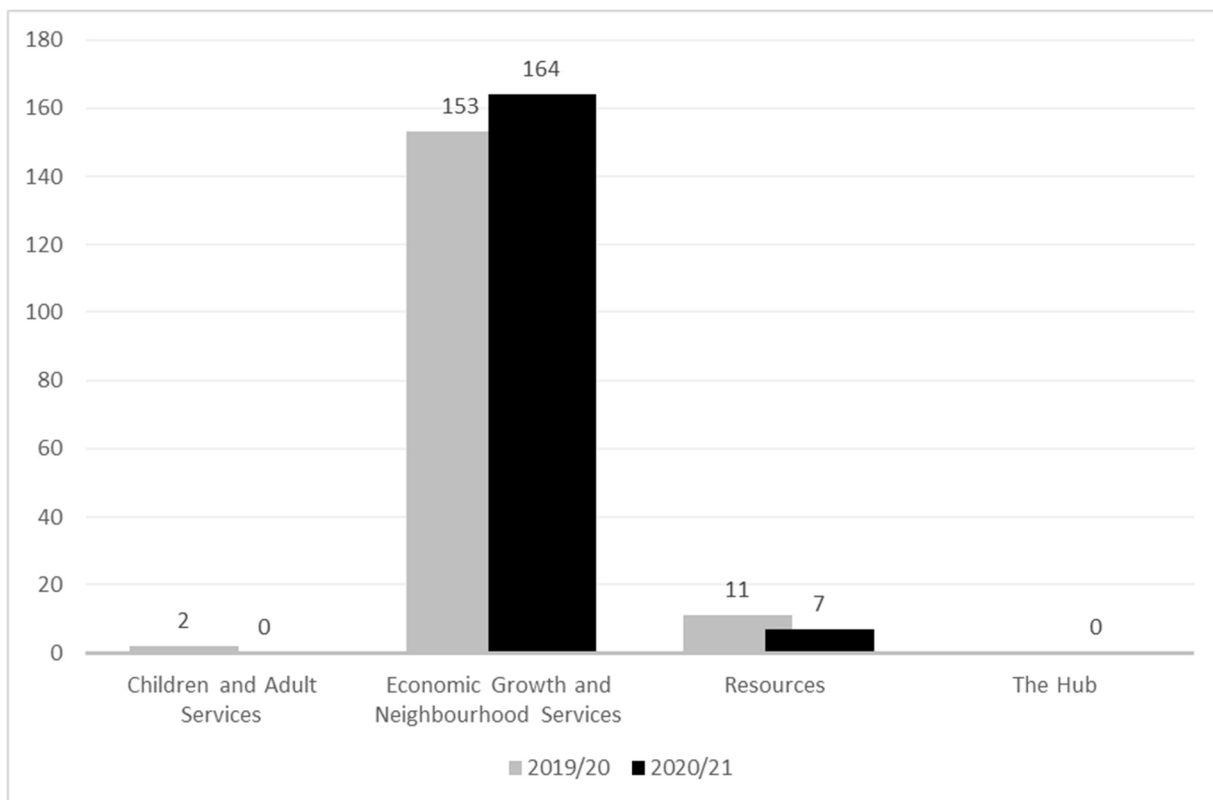
*N.B. The majority of compliments about Children and Adult Services are detailed in either the Children's or Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2020/21.*

20. Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services received 186 compliments, an increase from 158 in 2019/20.

21. Resources received eight compliments, as was the case in 2019/20.

22. The Hub received 13 compliments.

### Comments by Department

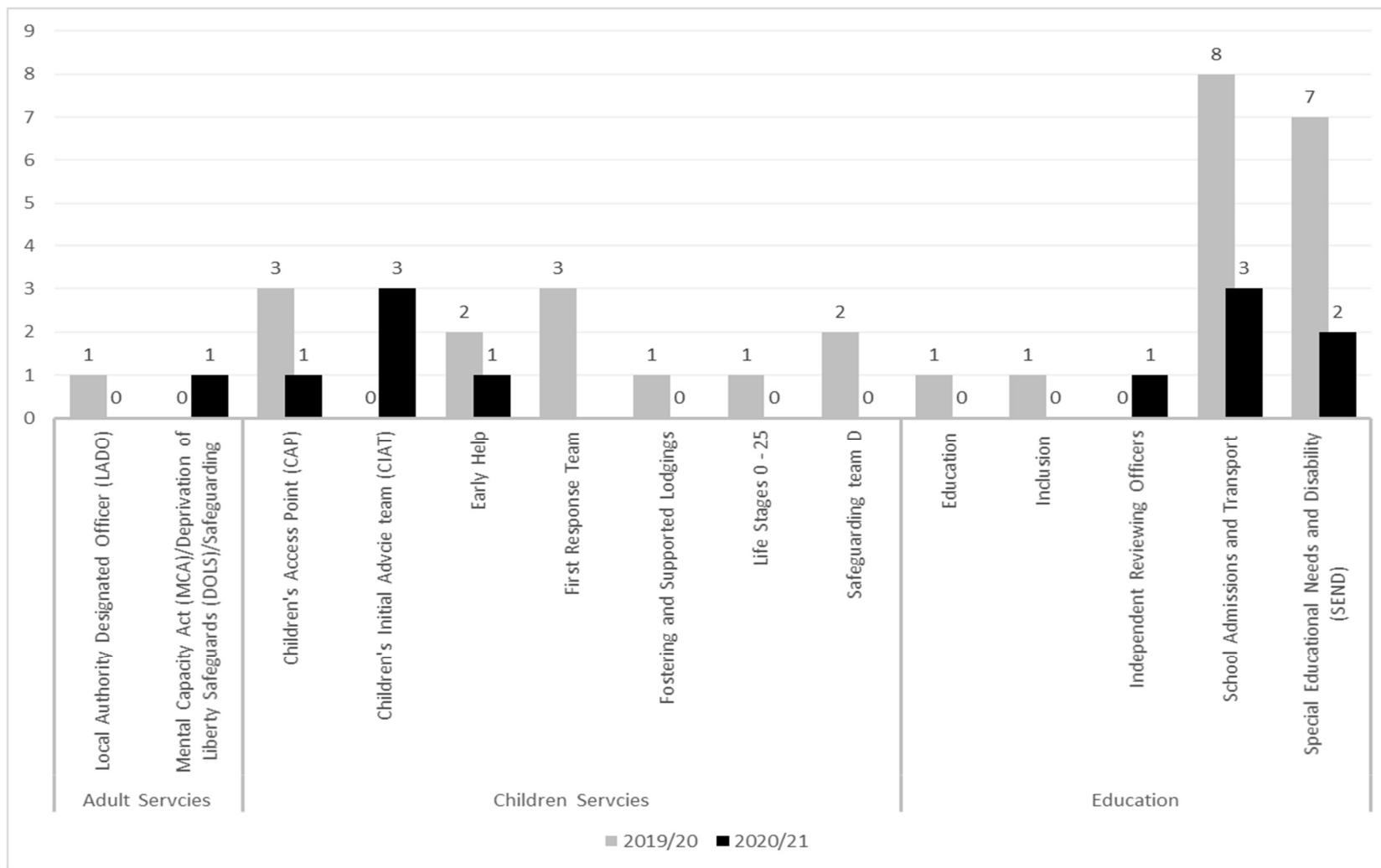


*N.B. Comparison data is not available for The Hub which was set up in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

- 23. Children and Adult Services received zero comments, a decrease from two in 2019/20.
- 24. Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services received 164 comments, an increase from 153 in 2019/20.
- 25. Resources received seven comments, a decrease from 11 in 2019/20.
- 26. The Hub received zero comments.



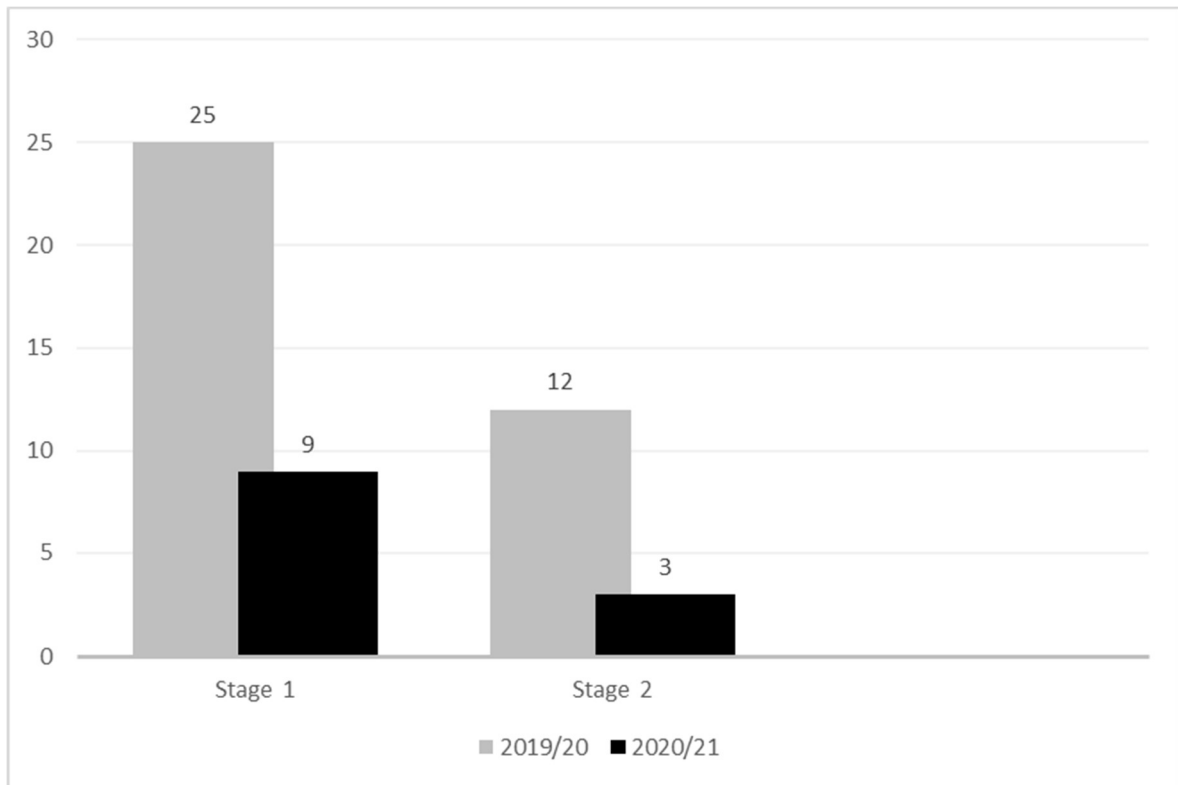
### Complaints, Compliments and Comments by Department Children and Adult Services Complaints by Service Area/Team



*N.B. Comparison data is not available for First Response Team teams due to changes in the Council's organisational structure.*

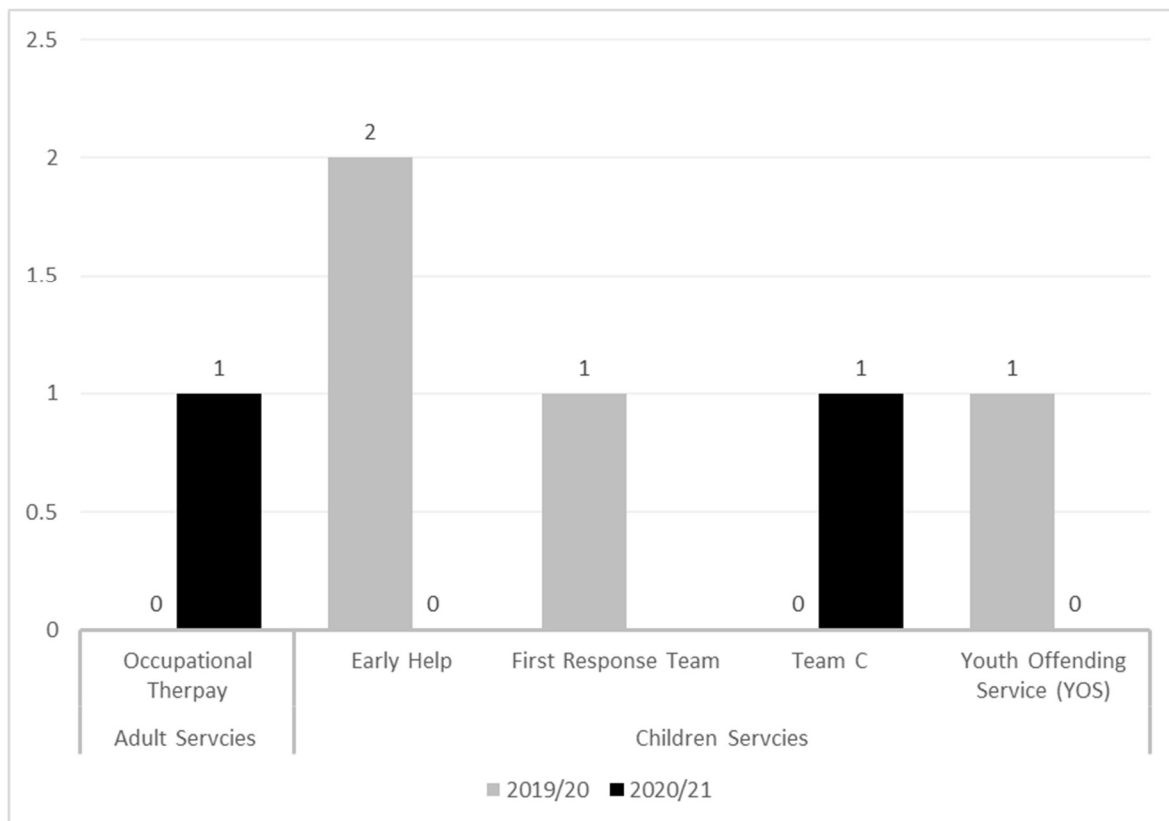
27. Children and Adults Services received 12 complaints, a significant decrease from 30 in 2019/20. This was primarily as a result of the decrease in complaints for School Admissions and Transport and SEND, in relation to School Transport and Education Health Care (EHC) Plans.

**Complaints by Stage**



28. Three complaints were escalated directly to Stage 2.

### Compliments by Service Area/Team

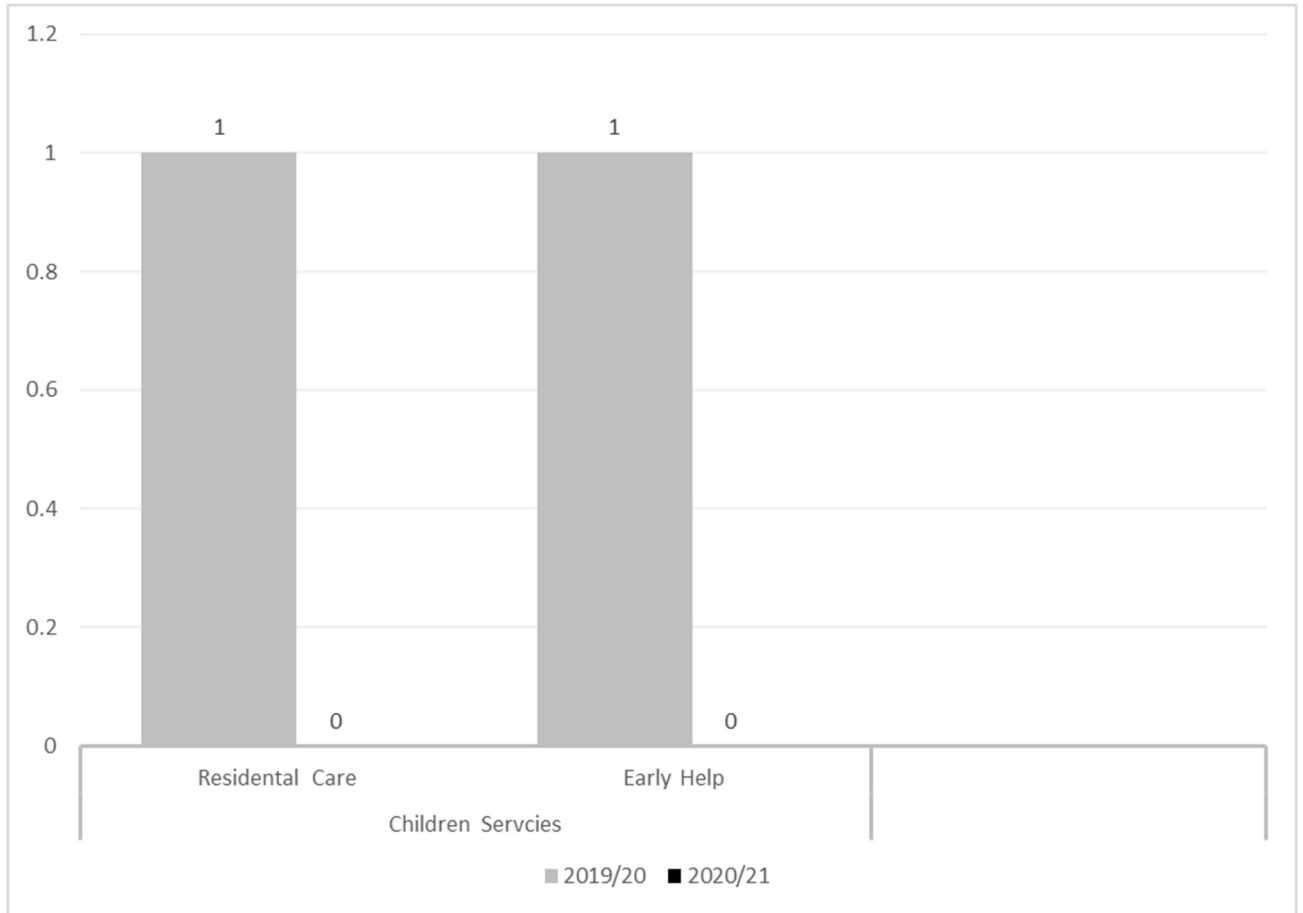


29. Children and Adult Services received two corporate compliments, a decrease from four in 2019/20.

*N.B. Comparison data is not available for First Response Team teams due to changes in the Council's organisational structure.*

*The majority of compliments about Children and Adult Services are detailed in either the Children's or Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2020/21.*

### Comments by Service Area/Team



30. Children and Adults Services received zero corporate comments, a decrease from two in 2019/20.

### Complaints by Outcome

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

#### Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Children's Access Point	0	0	0	1	1	2
First Response Team	1	0	0	0	0	1
Early Help Co-ordinator	0	0	1	0	0	1
Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT)	0	2	0	0	1	3
SEND	0	0	0	2	0	2
School Admissions & Transport	0	1	1	1	0	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>

#### Stage 2 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Children's Access Point	0	0	1	0	0	1
Independent Reviewing Officers	0	1	0	0	0	1
SEND	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

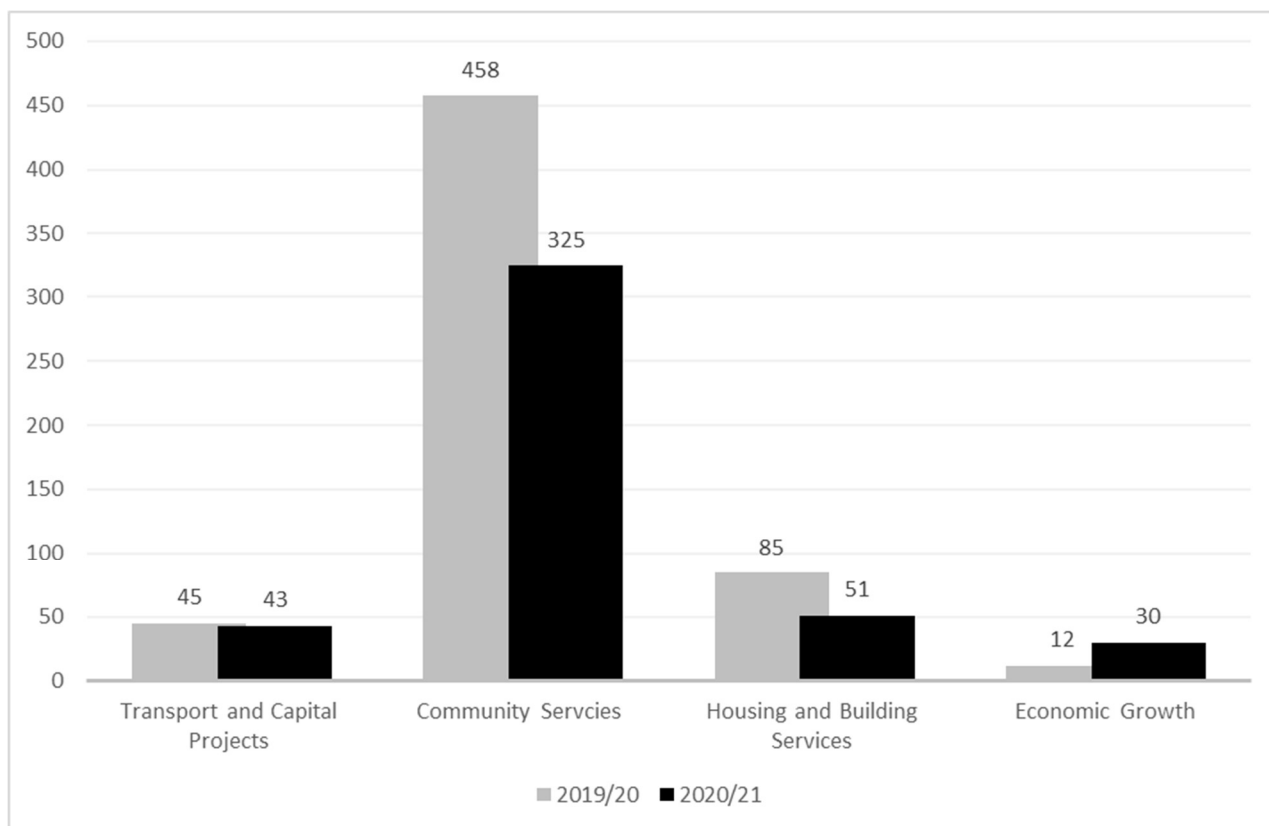
## **Organisational Learning**

32. 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, a number of service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2020/21.
33. Following a complaint for the Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT), as a training issue social workers were advised to let the caller know that if they are quite they have not gone off the line, they are simply listening and writing notes.
34. Following a complaint for School Admissions & Transport a process was agreed in relation to handing over information when an officer leaves the service.
35. Following a further complaint for School Admissions & Transport the taxi operator was advised to make sure drivers check passengers have buckled their seatbelts before departing.

## Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

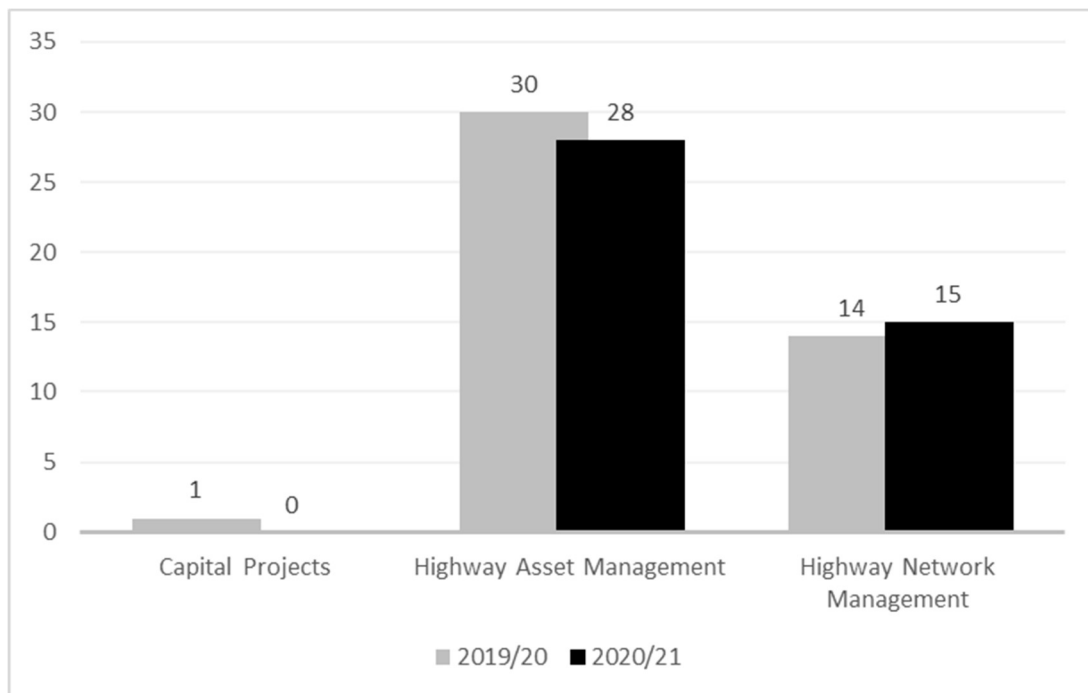
### Complaints by Service Area/Team

#### Overview



- 36. Transport and Capital Projects received 43 complaints, a slight decrease from 45 in 2019/20.
- 37. Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services received 325 complaints, a significant decrease from 458 complaints in 2019/20.
- 38. Housing and Building Services received 51 complaints, a significant decrease from 85 in 2019/20.
- 39. Economic Growth received 30 complaints, a significant increase from 12 in 2019/20.

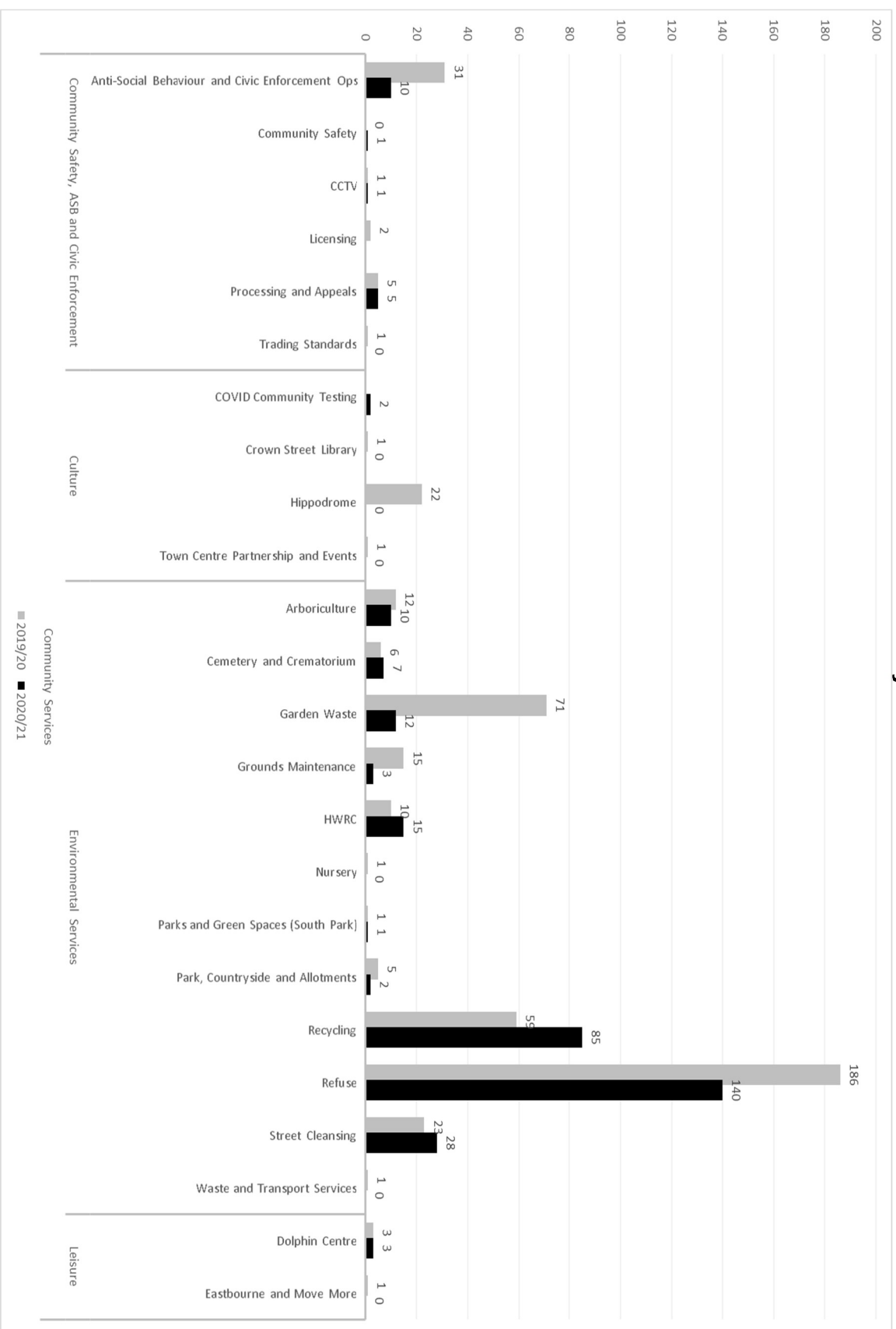
### Transport and Capital Projects



- 40. Highway Asset Management received 28 complaints, a slight decrease from 30 in 2019/20. The most common theme was the disturbance residents experienced as a result of road works.
- 41. Highway Network Management received 15 complaints, a slight increase from 14 in 2019/20. There were no common themes identified.



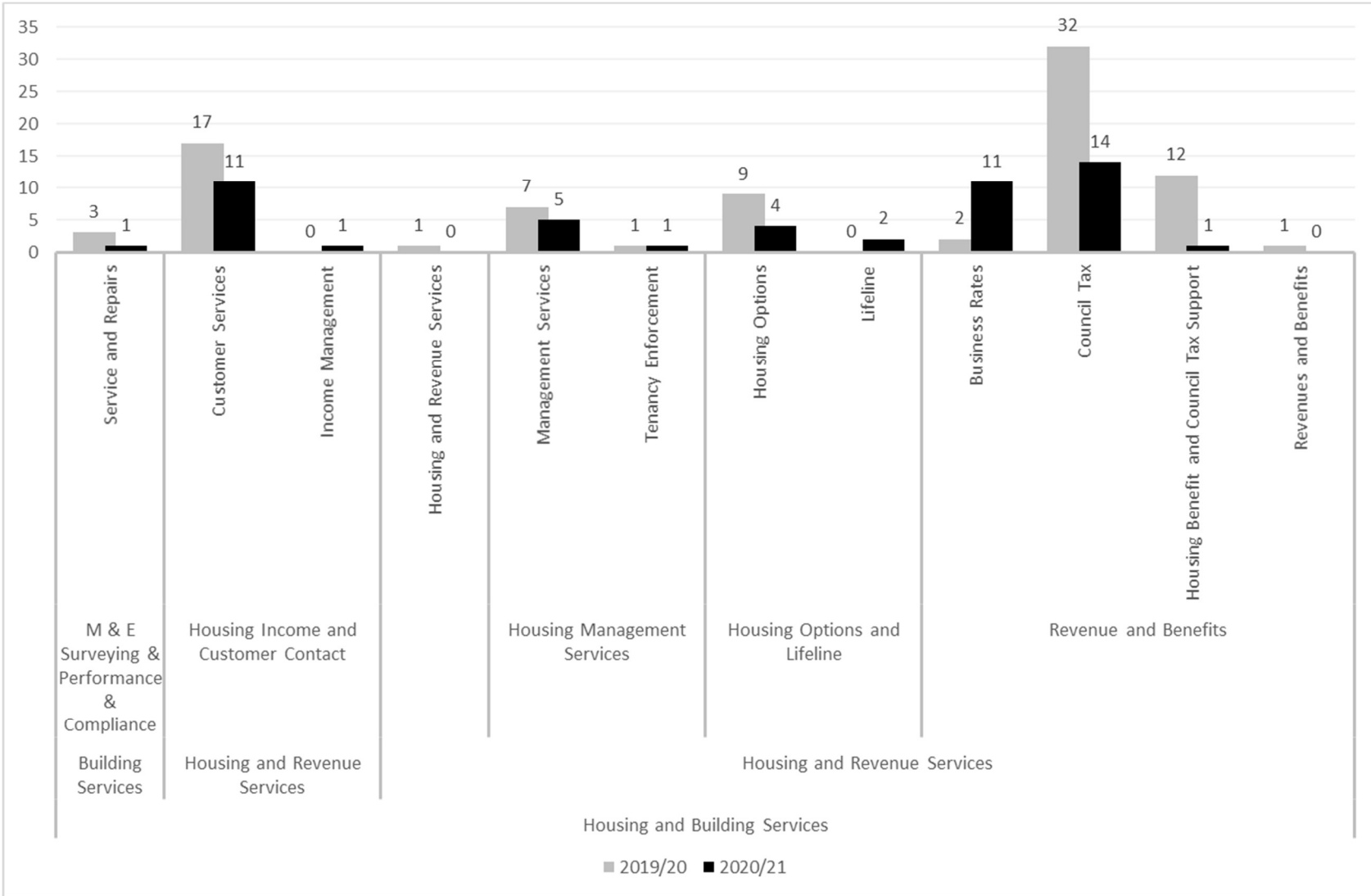
## Community Services



*N.B. Comparison data is not available for COVID Community Testing which was set up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

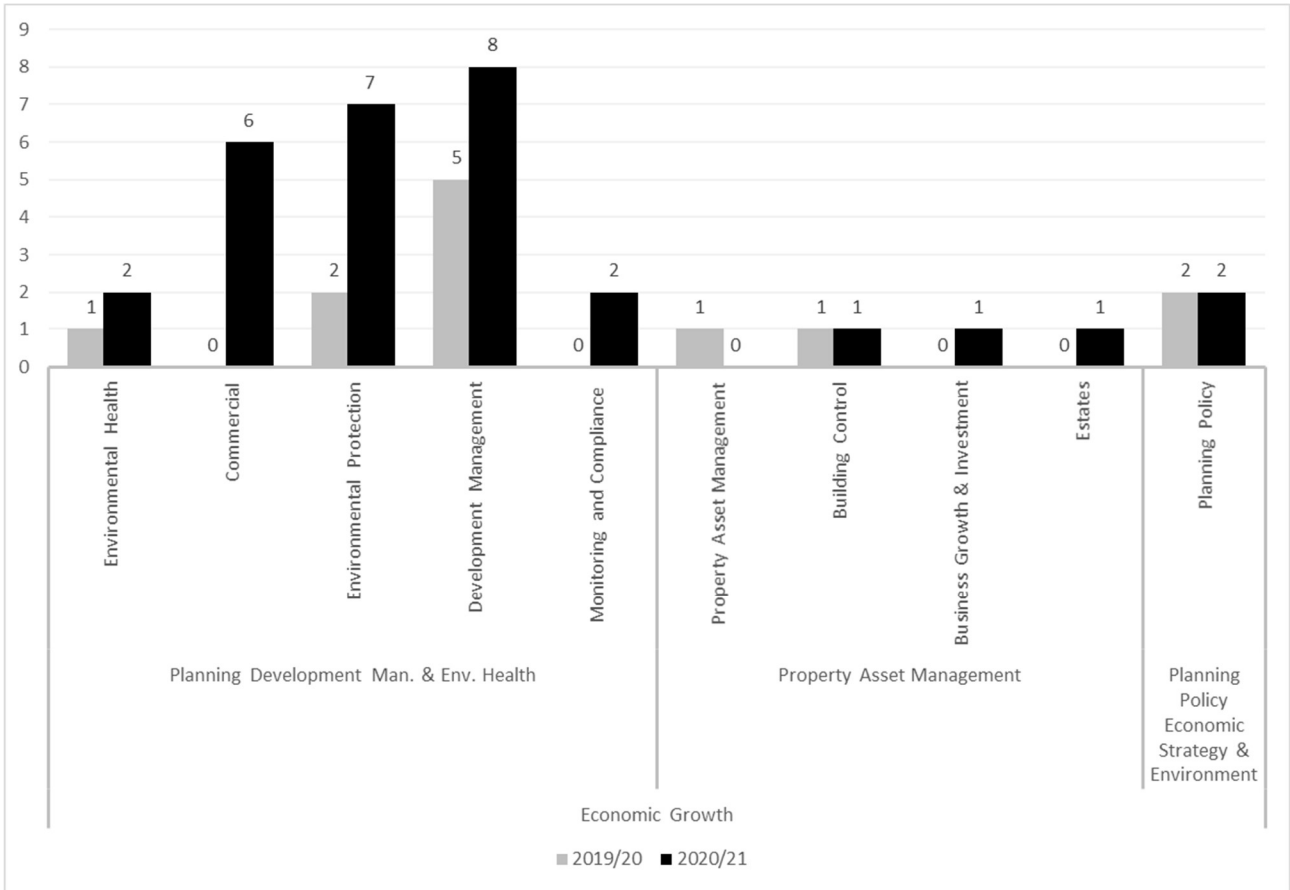
42. ASB and Civic Enforcement Ops received 10 complaints, a significant decrease from 31 in 2019/20. Lack of enforcement action was the most common cause of complaint.
43. The Hippodrome received zero complaints, a significant decrease from 22 during 2019/20. This was as a result of the theatre being closed due to COVID-19.
44. Arboriculture received 10 complaints, a slight decrease from 12 in 2019/20. As in 2019/20 these complaints generally resulted from a lack of response to initial enquiries and/or dissatisfaction with a decision not to undertake works to a tree for the reasons requested.
45. Garden Waste saw a significant decrease in complaints, 21 compared to 71 in 2019/20. The high volume of complaints in the previous year were mainly due to teething issues when the service was first launched.
46. Grounds Maintenance received three complaints, a significant decrease from 15 in 2019/20.
47. Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) received 15 complaints, an increase from 10 in 2019/20. Complaints concerned staff attitude/behaviour, service provision, people not being able to access the tip, large queues and closures.
48. Recycling Collection received 85 complaints, a significant increase from 59 in 2019/20. Complaints primarily related to collections being missed on one or more occasions.
49. Refuse Collection received 140 complaints, a significant decrease from 186 in 2019/20. Complaints primarily related to collections being missed on one or more occasions.
50. Street Cleansing received 28 complaints, an increase from 23 in 2019/20. These primarily related to the lack and quality of the service provided.

### Housing and Building Services



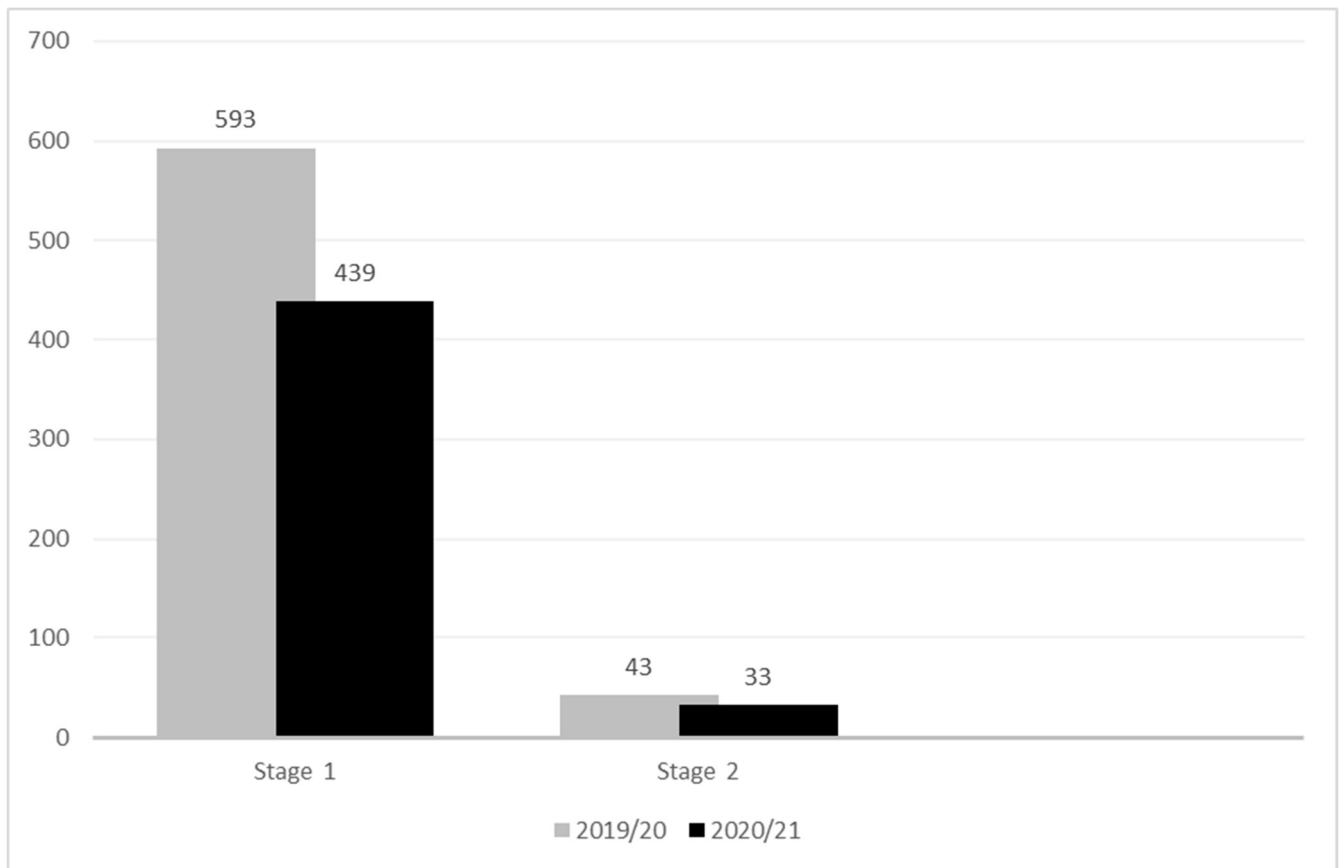
51. Customer Services received 11 complaints, a reduction from 17 in 2019/20. There were no discernible themes identified.
52. Business Rates received 11 complaints, an increase from two in 2019/20. The increase can be attributed to people complaining about the decision not to award them a COVID-19 related grant.
53. Council Tax received 14 complaints, a significant decrease from 32 in 2019/20. Issues with communication was the only identifiable theme.
54. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support received one complaint, a significant reduction from 12 in 2019/20.

### Economic Growth



55. There was an overall increase in complaints for Environmental Health (including Commercial & Environmental Protection). Complaints primarily concerned the lack of support in relation to the issues raised and dissatisfaction with being issued a Fixed Penalty Notice.

### Complaints by Stage

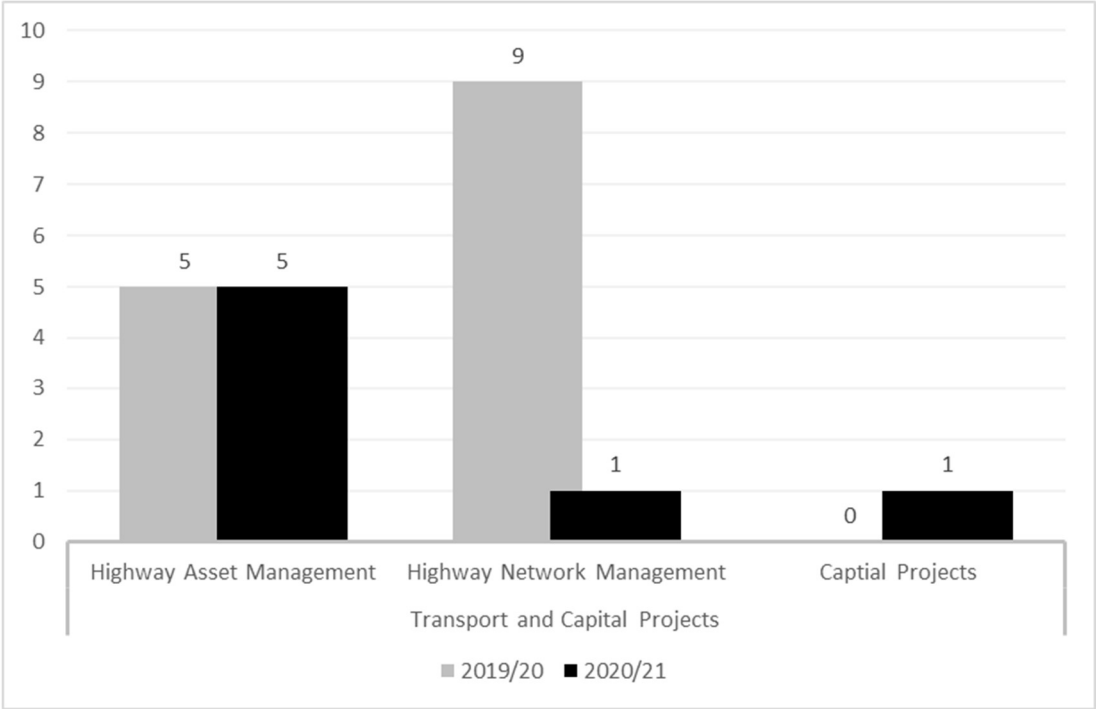


56. Nine complaints were escalated straight to stage 2.

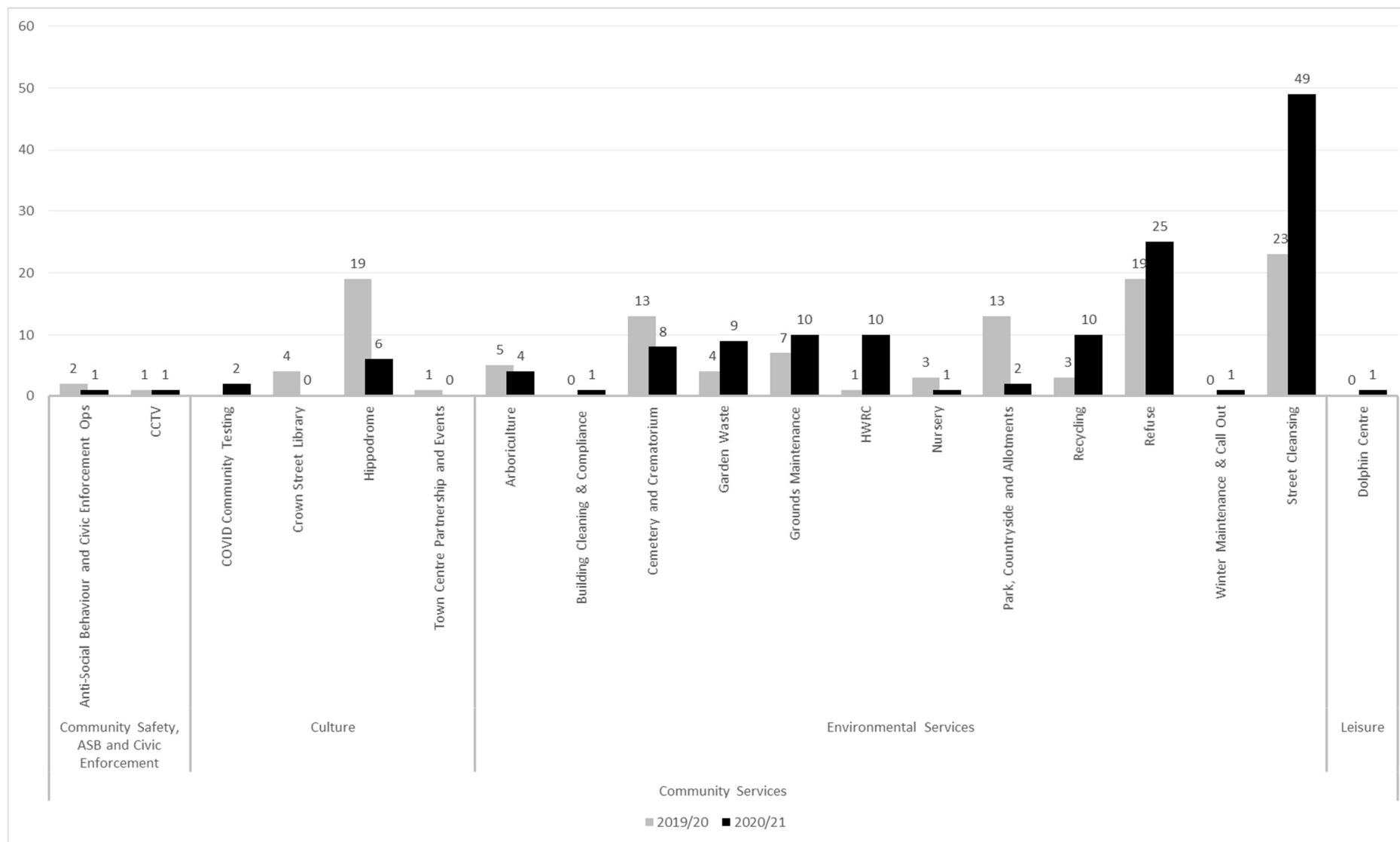
*N.B. One complaint was referred directly to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.*

### Compliments by Service Area/Team

#### Transport and Capital Projects



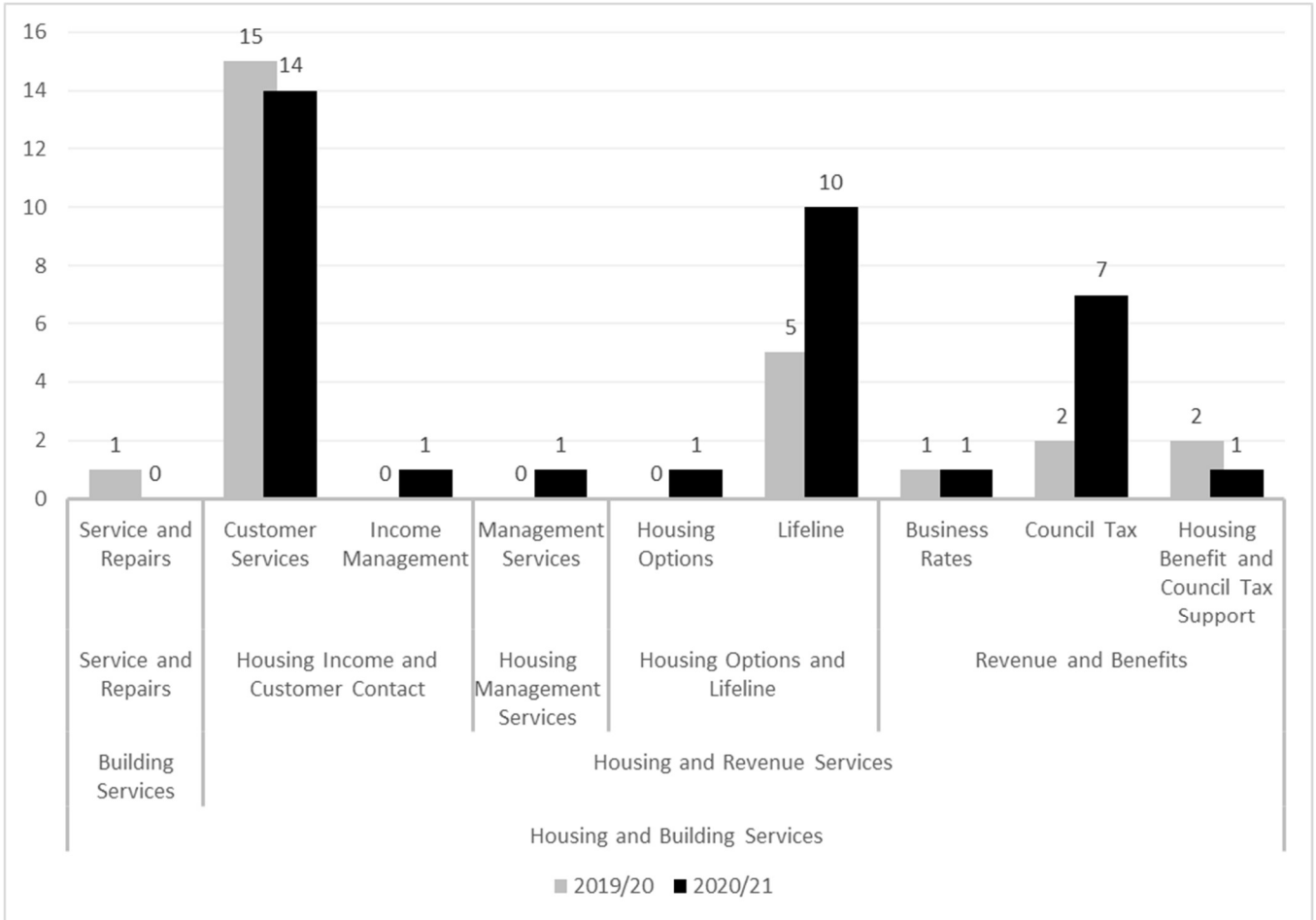
### Community Services



N.B. Comparison data is not available for COVID Community Testing which was set up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



### Housing and Building Services

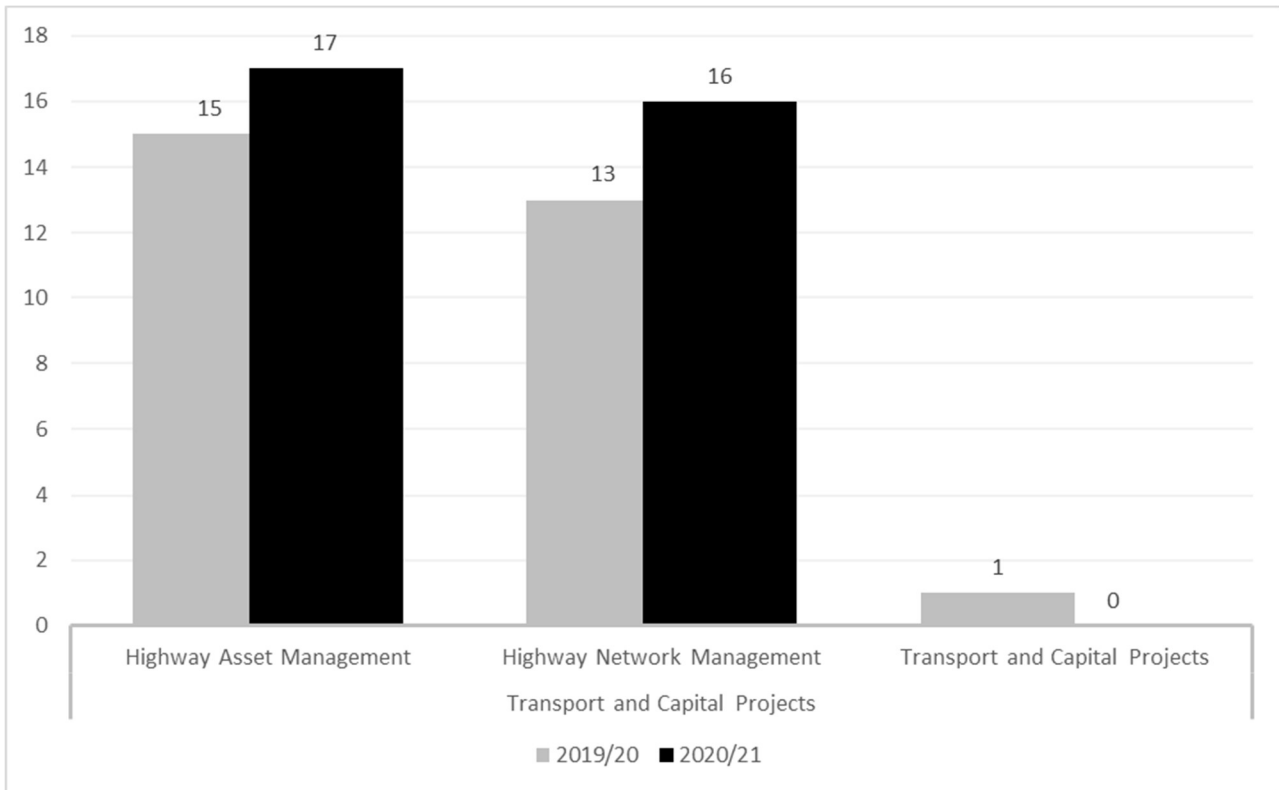


57. Planning, Development Management & Environmental Health, Environmental Protection received one compliment, an increase from zero in 2019/20.

58. Property Asset Management, Building Control received one compliment, an increase from zero in 2019/20.

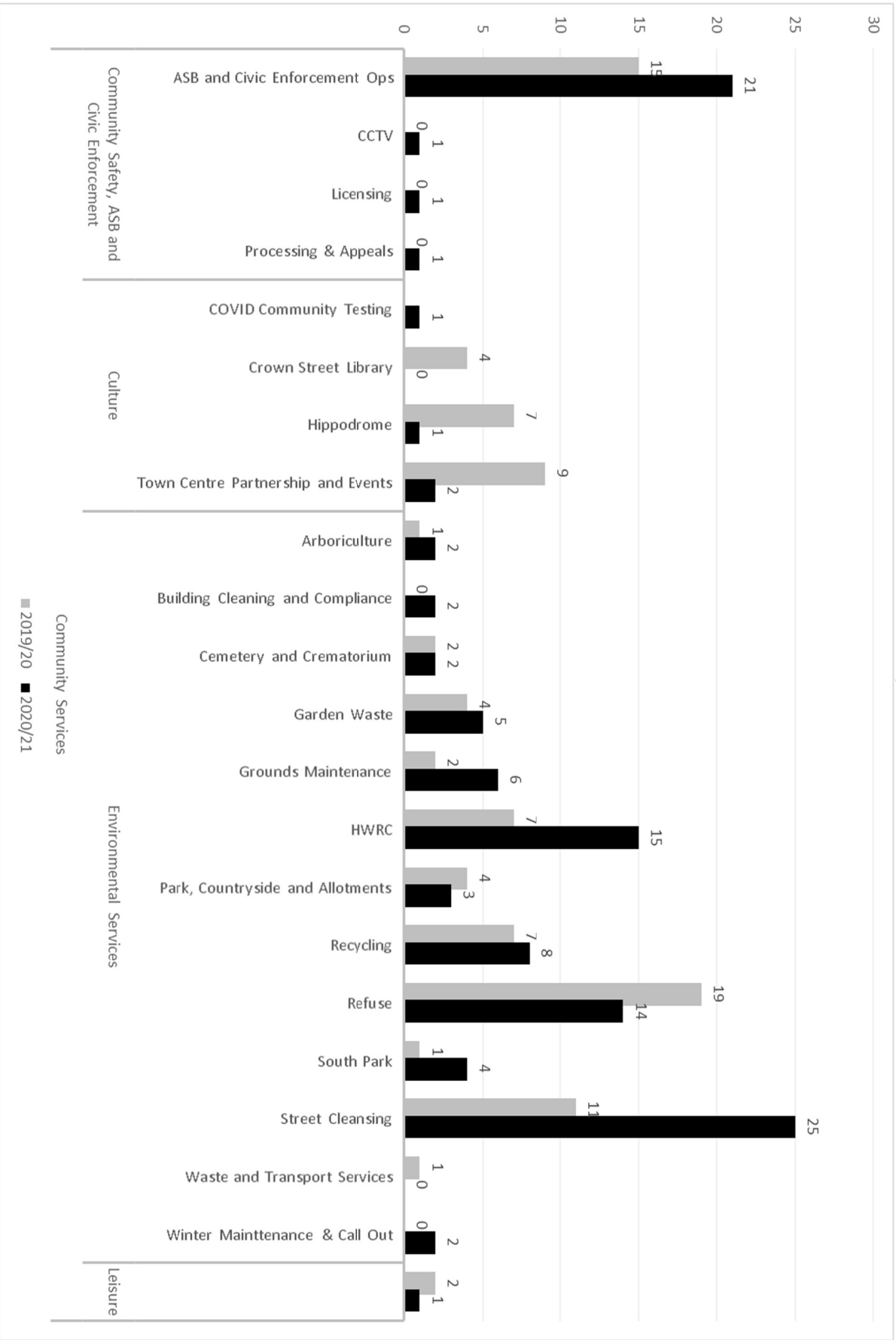
### Comments by Service Area/Team

#### Transport and Capital Projects



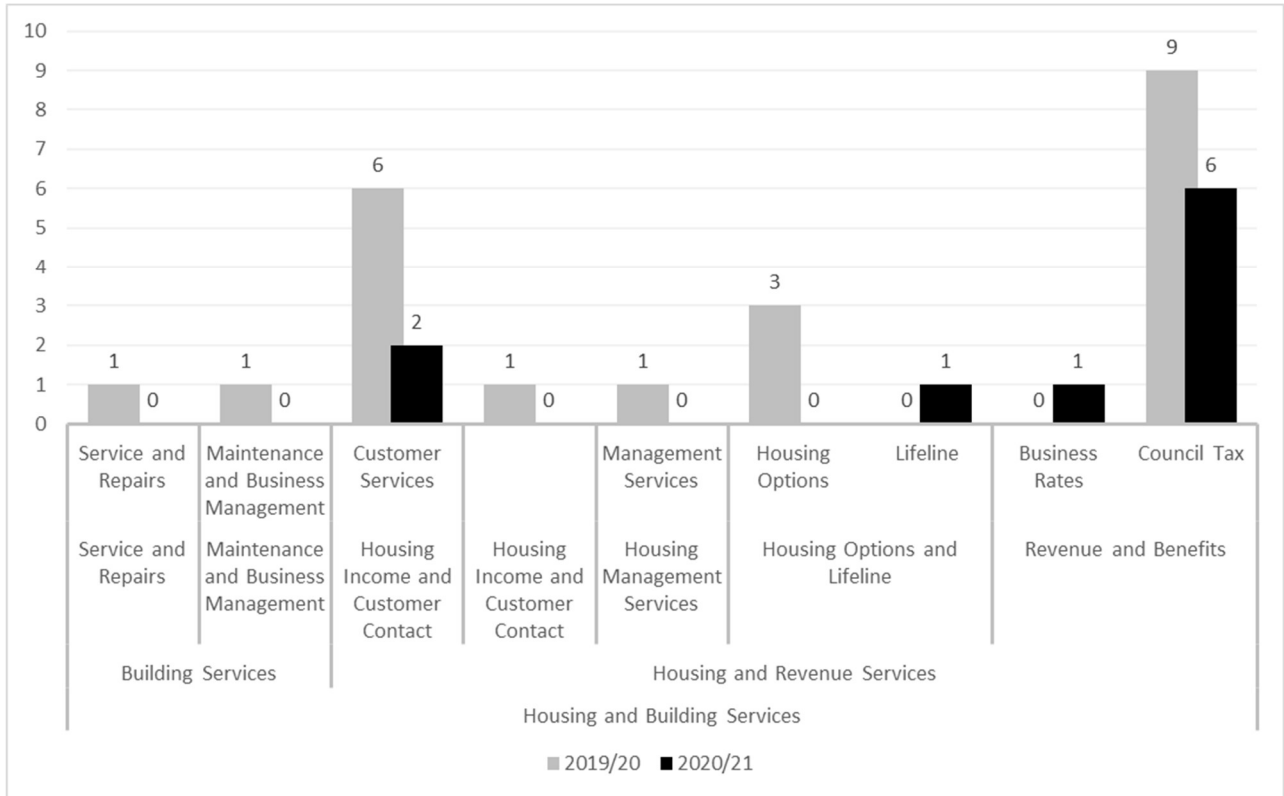
59. The identifiable themes were quality of repairs, issues with congestion and renewal of bus passes.

### Community Services

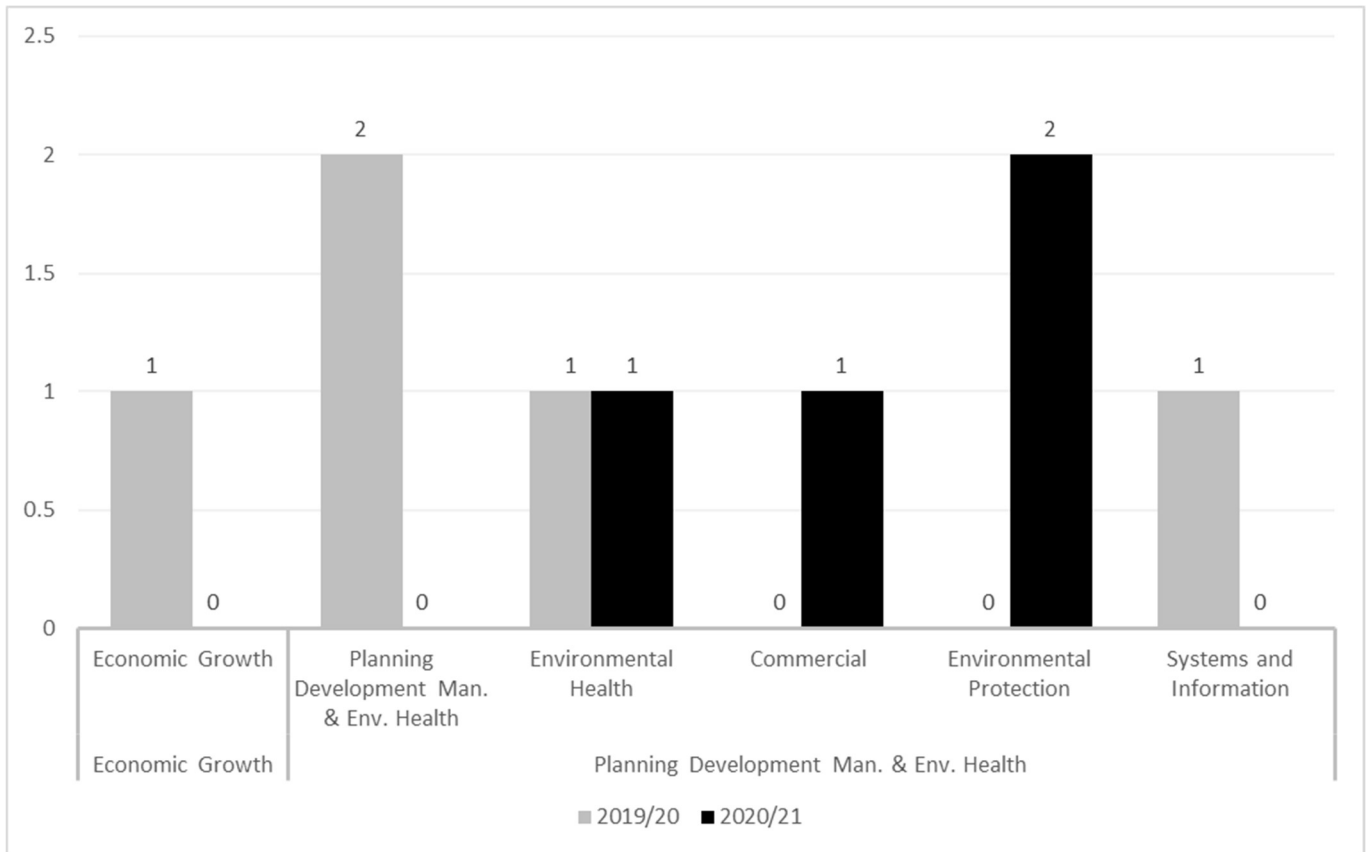


60. ASB and Civic Enforcement received 21 comments, an increase from 15 in 2019/20. The only identifiable theme was dissatisfaction with the lack of enforcement action in relation to other people's refuse.
61. HWRC received 15 comments, an increase from seven in 2019/20. The increase in comments can be attributed to the changes made to the service as a result of COVID-19.
62. Refuse received 14 comments, a decrease from 19 in 2019/20. The most common theme was dissatisfaction with the Council's policy not to collect side waste.
63. Street Cleansing received 25 comments, a significant increase from 11 in 2019/20. Comments concerned the lack of and frequency with which litter and dog waste bins are emptied and the standard of street cleansing.

### Housing and Building Services



### Economic Growth



### Complaints by Outcome

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

#### Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Closed With No Response	Escalated to Stage 2 (No S1 Response)	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Highway Asset Management	0	0	0	15	1	9	1	26
Highway Network Management	0	0	0	5	3	2	0	10
Community Safety	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
ASB & Civic Enforcement	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
CCTV	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Anti-Social Behaviour & Civic Enforcement Ops	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
Processing & Appeals	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
COVID Community Testing	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Arboriculture	0	0	0	6	2	1	0	9
Cemetery & Crematorium	0	0	0	4	0	4	0	8
Parks, Countryside & Allotments	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
South Park	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Grounds Maintenance	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	4
Street Cleansing	0	0	0	12	1	13	1	27
Garden Waste	0	0	0	5	0	8	0	13
Recycling	0	0	5	28	6	45	1	85
Refuse	1	0	17	50	6	69	5	148
HWRC	0	0	1	5	0	7	0	13
Dolphin Centre	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Service & Repairs	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Customer Services	0	0	0	1	1	3	4	9
Income Management	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1

<b>Service Area/Team</b>	<b>Closed With No Response</b>	<b>Escalated to Stage 2 (No S1 Response)</b>	<b>Inconclusive</b>	<b>Not Upheld</b>	<b>Partially Upheld</b>	<b>Upheld</b>	<b>Withdrawn</b>	<b>Total</b>
Management Services	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	<b>4</b>
Housing Options	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	<b>3</b>
Lifeline	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	<b>2</b>
Business Rates	0	0	0	8	0	0	2	<b>10</b>
Council Tax	0	0	1	7	0	3	3	<b>14</b>
Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Development Management	0	1	0	2	0	2	1	<b>6</b>
Environmental Health	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
Commercial	0	0	0	3	0	1	2	<b>6</b>
Environmental Protection	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	<b>6</b>
Monitoring & Compliance	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Building Control	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Estates	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Business Growth & Investment	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Planning Policy	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>433</b>



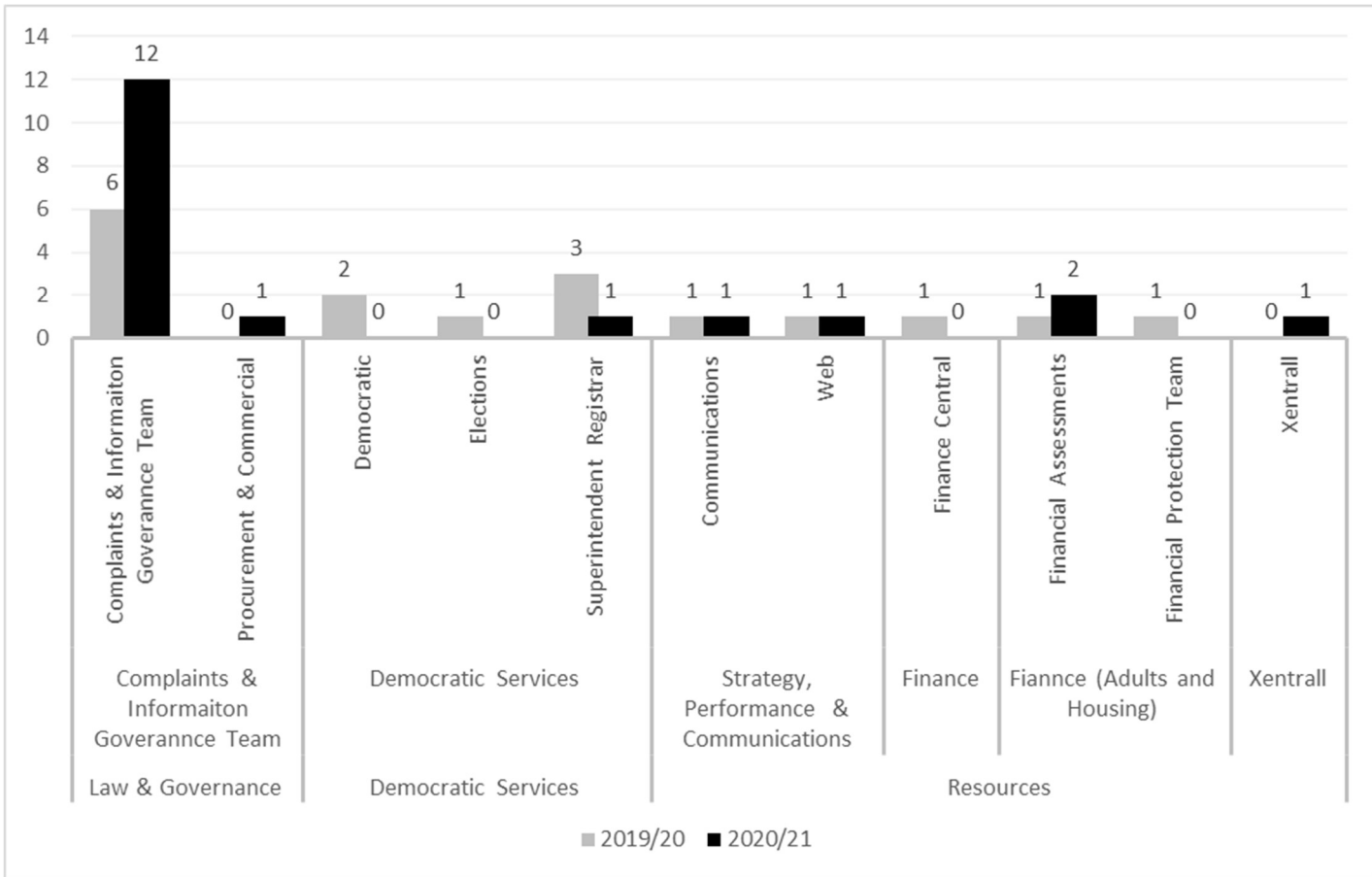
**Stage 2 Outcomes**

<b>Service Area/Team</b>	<b>Inconclusive</b>	<b>Not Upheld</b>	<b>Partially Upheld</b>	<b>Upheld</b>	<b>Withdrawn</b>	<b>Total</b>
Highway Asset Management	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Highway Network Management	0	3	0	0	0	<b>3</b>
ASB & Civic Enforcement	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Anti-Social Behaviour & Civic Enforcement Ops	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Processing & Appeals	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Arboriculture	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Street Cleansing	0	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
Recycling	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Refuse	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
HWRC	0	1	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Management Services	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Business Rates	0	3	0	0	0	<b>3</b>
Council Tax	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Development Management	0	1	0	0	1	<b>2</b>
Property Asset Management	0	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>21</b>

## Organisational Learning

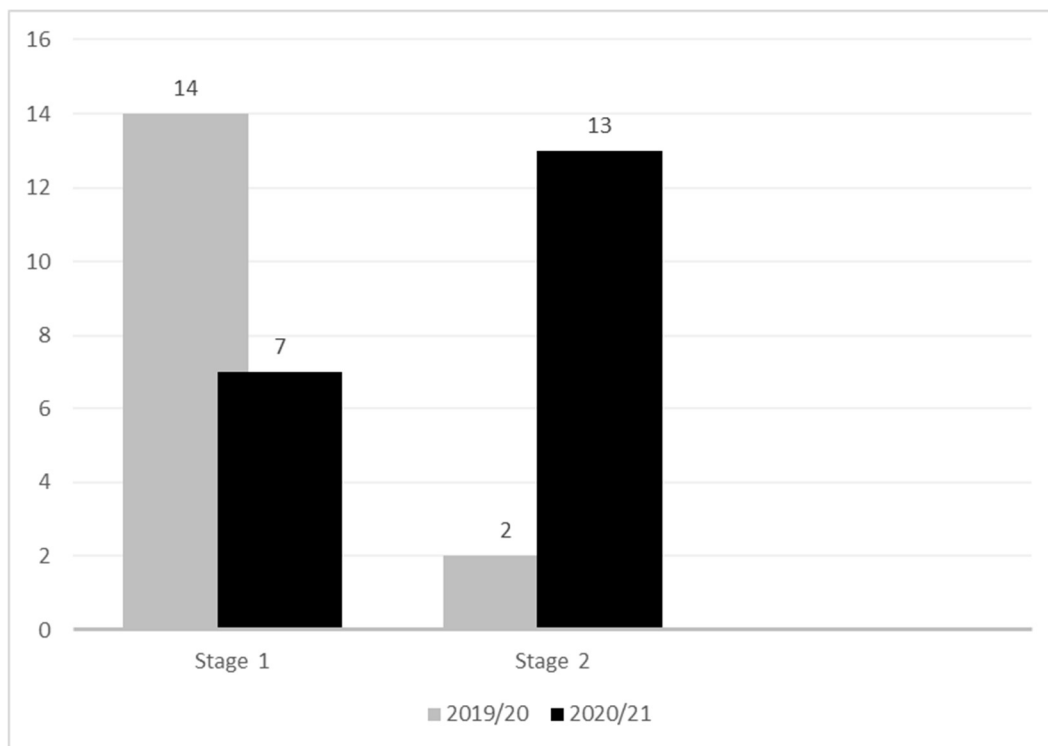
65. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, a number of service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2020/21.
66. As a result of a complaint for Anti-Social Behaviour & Civic Enforcement Ops it was agreed, that where requested or appropriate to do so decisions would be communicated in writing and that where decisions are not communicated in writing a contemporaneous note would be made, including the time and date the decision was communicated. It was also recommended that Civic Enforcement should ensure all decisions are appropriately recorded in a centrally accessible location i.e. either on the Council's network or in a line of business application.
67. Following a complaint about a booking at the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) it was agreed the Council would update the date format in the booking system to the UK format, ensure a record of the fact the Council process people's personal data in relation to HWRC bookings was included in its Information Asset Register and that this information was communicated to the public in the Council's [privacy notice](#).
68. Following a complaint for Housing Options it was agreed the Council would undertake a review of its existing housing stock to try and identify properties that could be potentially be adapted.
69. Following a complaint for Housing Management Services officers were reminded to follow procedure when responding to reports of anti-social behaviour.
70. Following a complaint for Highway Asset Management about road works commencing too early the Council addressed the issue with the sub-contractor to prevent a re-occurrence.

**Complaints, Compliments and Comments by Department  
Resources  
Complaints by Service Area/Team Overview**



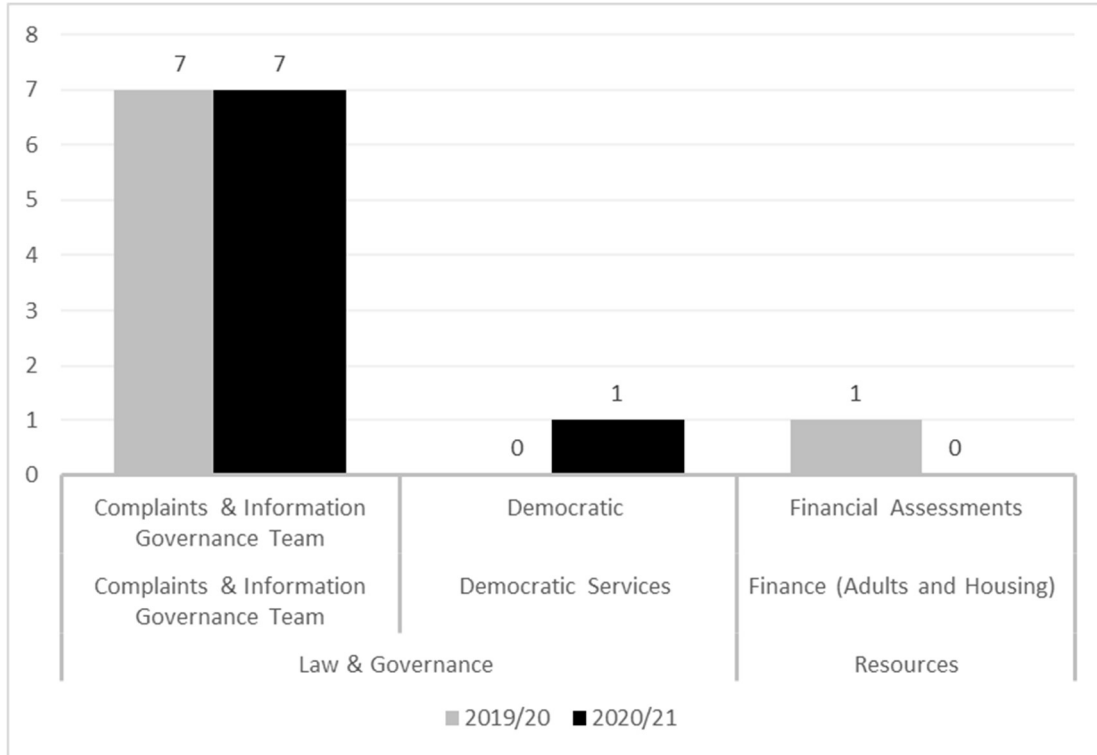
71. The Complaints and Information Governance Team received 12 complaints, an increase from six in 2019/20. The most common themes were delays in responding to and the content of responses to Subject Access Requests.

### Complaints by Stage

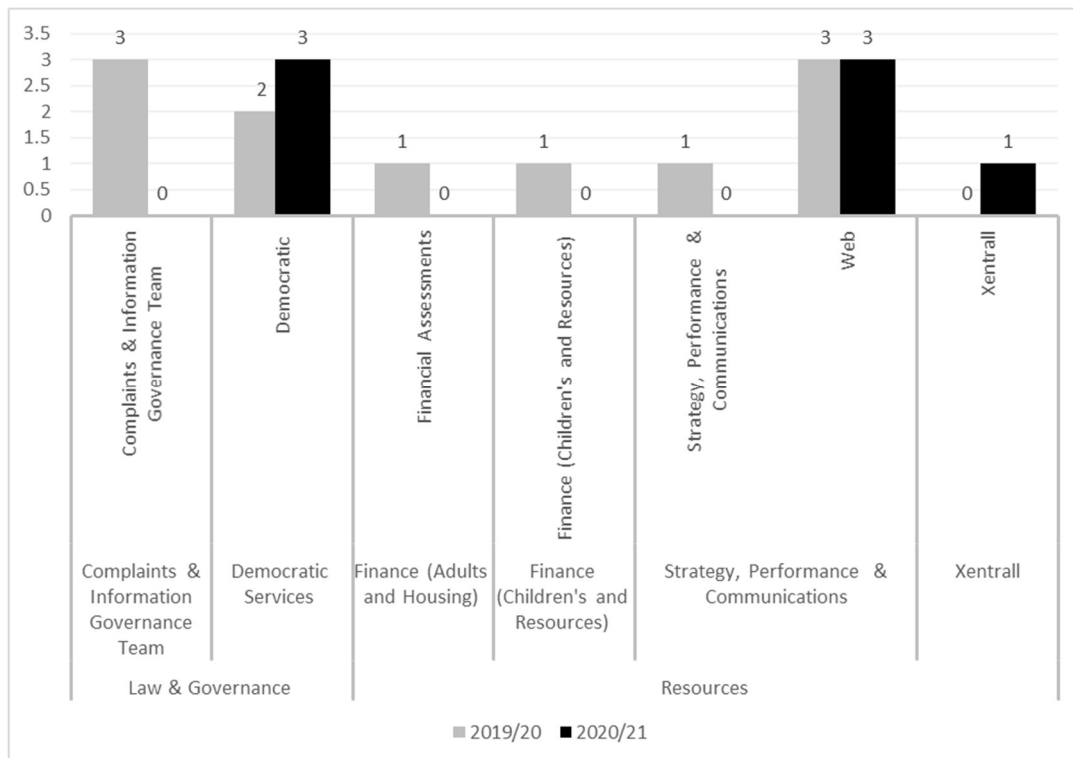


72. 11 of the complaints concerned data protection issues and requests and as such were dealt with directly at Stage 2 in accordance with the corporate procedure. One other complaint was escalated directly to Stage 2.

### Compliments by Service Area/Team



### Comments by Service Area/Team



### Complaints by Outcome

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

#### Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Complaints & Information Governance Team	0	0	0	1	0	1
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	1	1
Superintendent Registrar	0	0	0	1	0	1
Procurement & Commercial	0	0	0	1	0	1
Web	0	0	1	0	0	1
Communications	0	1	0	0	0	1
Xentrall Services	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>

#### Stage 2 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Complaints & Information Governance Team	0	2	1	2	2	7
Superintendent Registrar	0	0	1	0	0	1
Financial Assessment Team	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>

## **Organisational Learning**

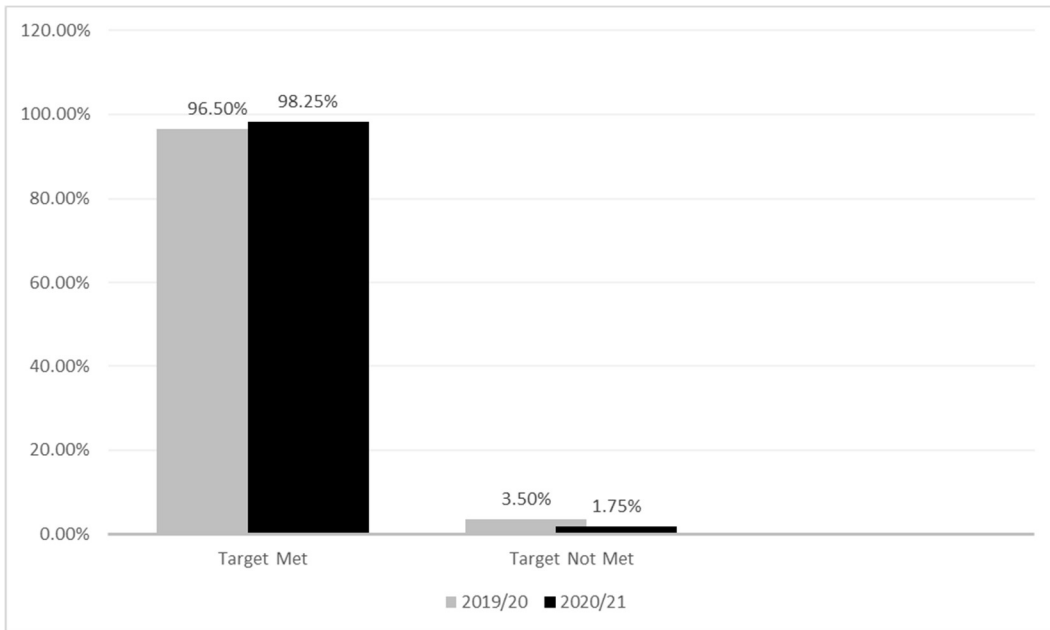
74. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, a number of service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2020/21.
75. Following a complaint for Xentrall it was agreed the Council would make a change to the Darlington Borough Council jobs page to include a sentence at the top of the page to make it clear that CVs are not accepted and that the application form can be found on the link to the job.
76. Following a complaint for the Superintendent Registrar the staff at the Registry Office reviewed their practice and bring it into line with the advice provided on .Gov.uk.
77. Following a complaint about the information requested from an individual wishing to make an insurance claim the website was updated to ensure the Council is complying with 'data minimisation' principle in UK GDPR.

### Performance against the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

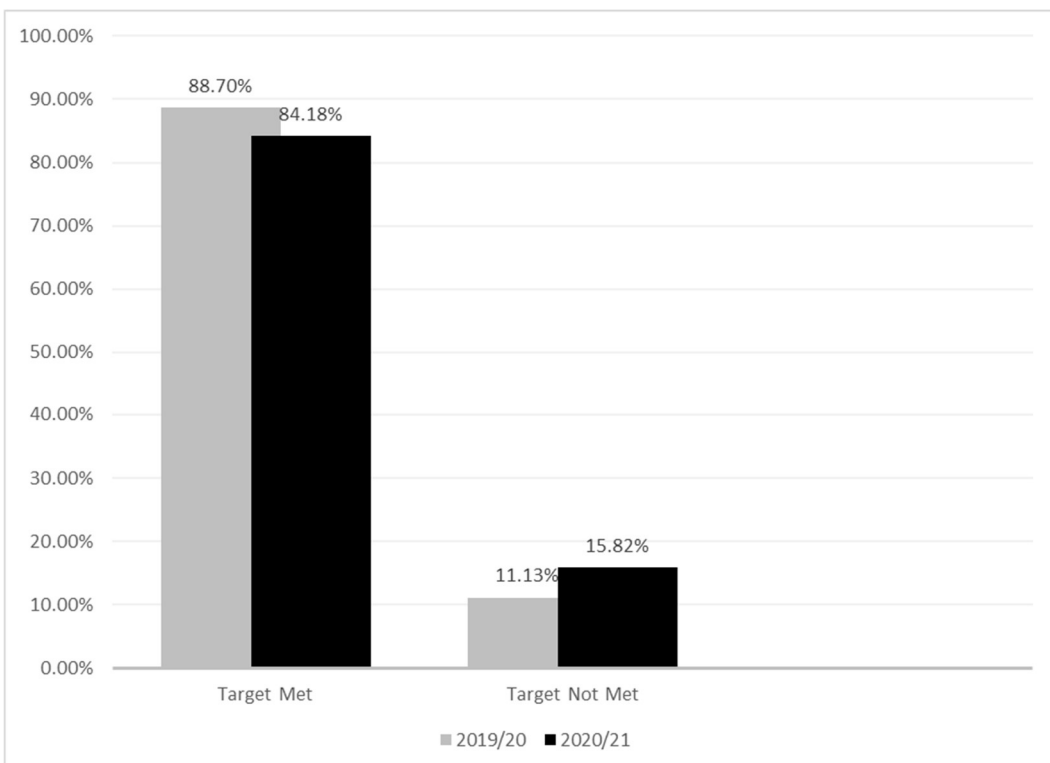
78. As a result of COVID-19 the Assistant Director Law and Governance made a [Delegated Decision](#) on 23 March 2020 that gave approval for timescales not to be adhered as a result of services diverting resources to the areas of greatest need.

#### Stage 1

##### Performance against Stage 1 acknowledgement target (3 working days)



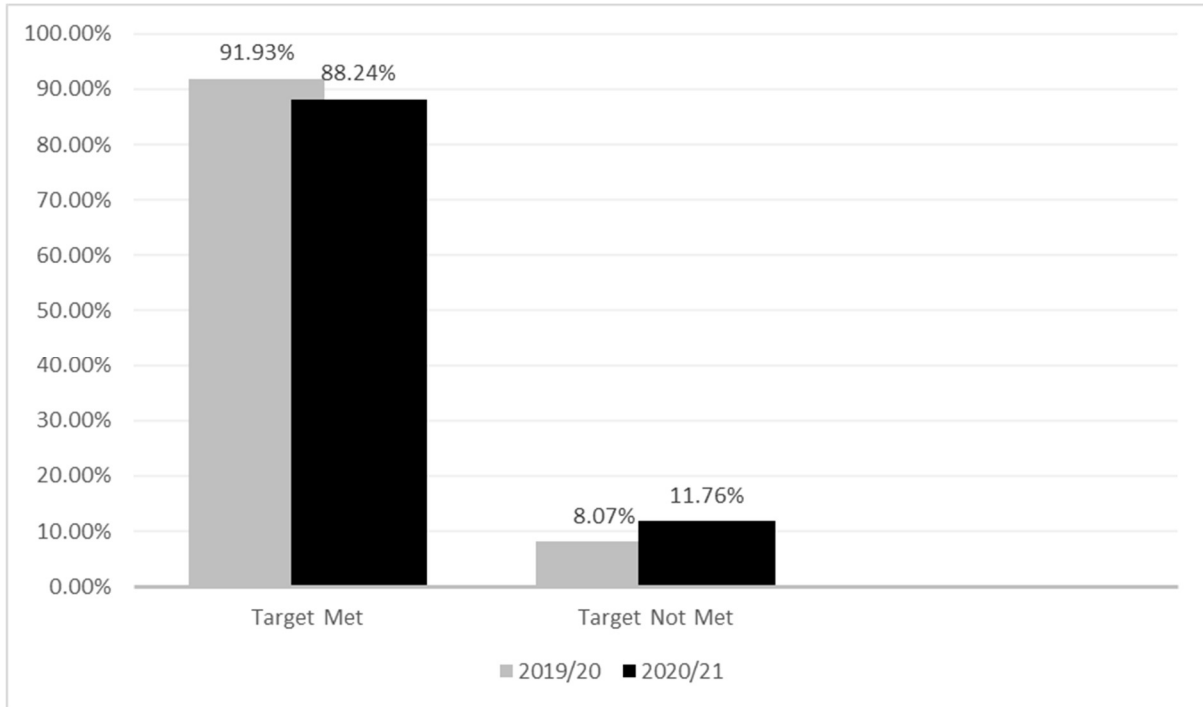
##### Performance against Stage 1 response target (25 working days)



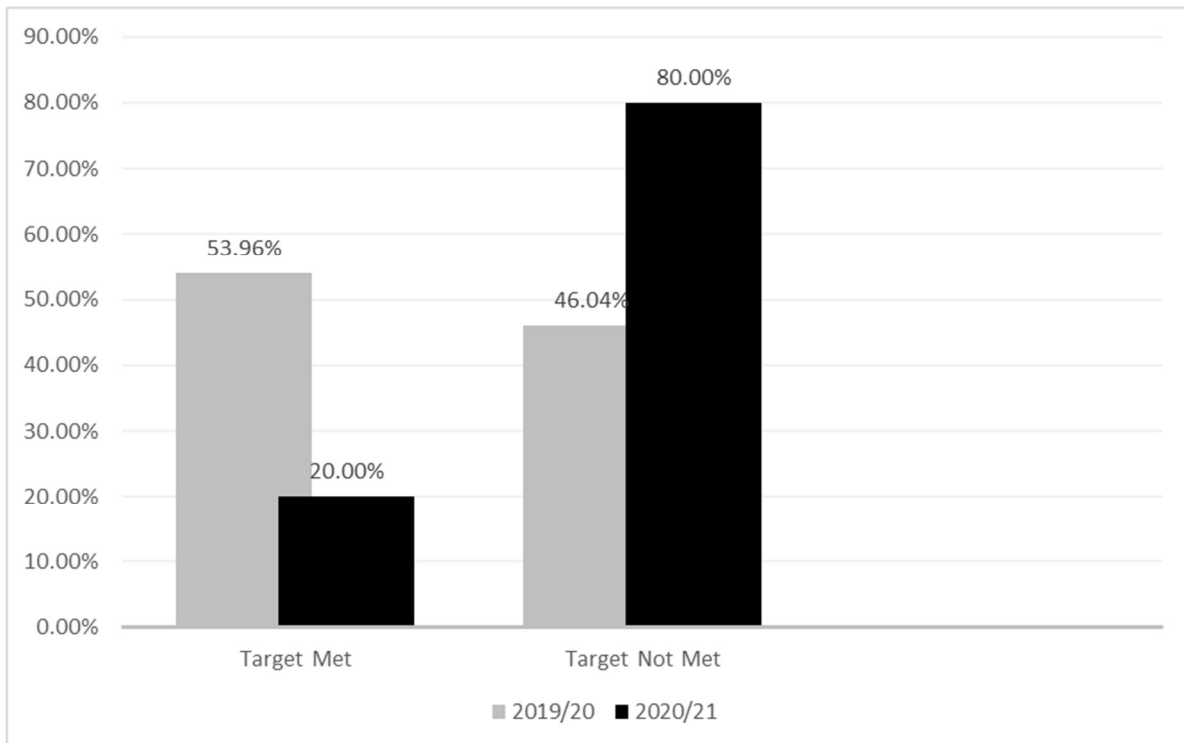


## Stage 2

### Performance against Stage 2 acknowledgement target (3 working days)



### Performance against Stage 2 response target (30 working days)



### **Further Recommendations**

79. The Council should work to improve performance against the Corporate Stage 2 response target.

### **Performance against Local Performance Indicators**

80. In relation to corporate complaints the Council's key performance indicator is the number of maladministration decisions received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Council received two maladministration decisions during 2020/21, an increase from one in 2019/20. Full details of those complaints determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 8 December 2020 and 7 September 2021 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).