

# **South Yorkshire Housing Association**

## **Board of Management**

**01 July 2020**

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### *Annual Review of Complaints 2019/20*

#### **1. Recommendation**

The Board is asked to NOTE the contents of the report.

#### **2. Background/Information**

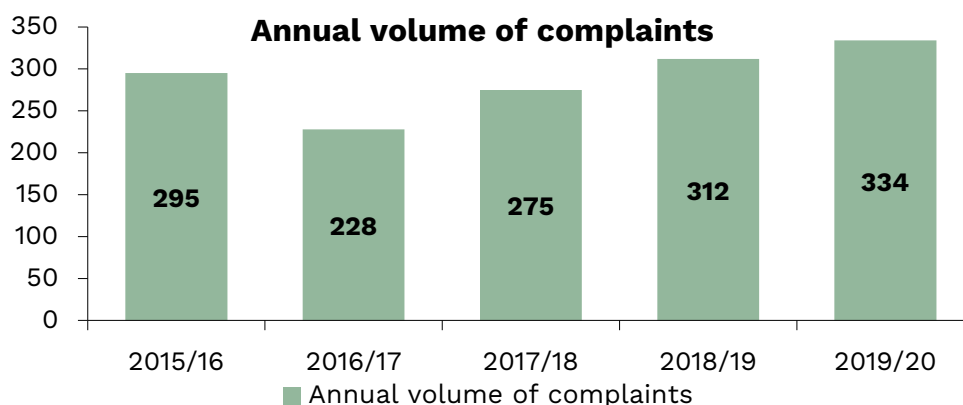
This report covers complaints recorded in 2019-2020 and makes comparisons with the previous four years where appropriate.

It provides data on the volume and types of complaint recorded, our response timescales and the feedback we gather on cases. It also considers the support and quality checks that the Performance Team provide to our customers and staff, and any improvements we have made to the process

In last year's report we talked about the need to review the Complaints Process in line with updates to CX, the establishment of the Customer Connect Team and external factors such as the Social Housing Green paper. We have not lost sight of the need for such a review, but this has been a year for consolidation as the Performance Team has undergone some staffing changes, CX continues to be developed, work continues on our 'Together with Tenants' offer, and we look forward to the launch of our customer portal which will bring exciting new opportunities to review the complaints process.

### 3. Findings

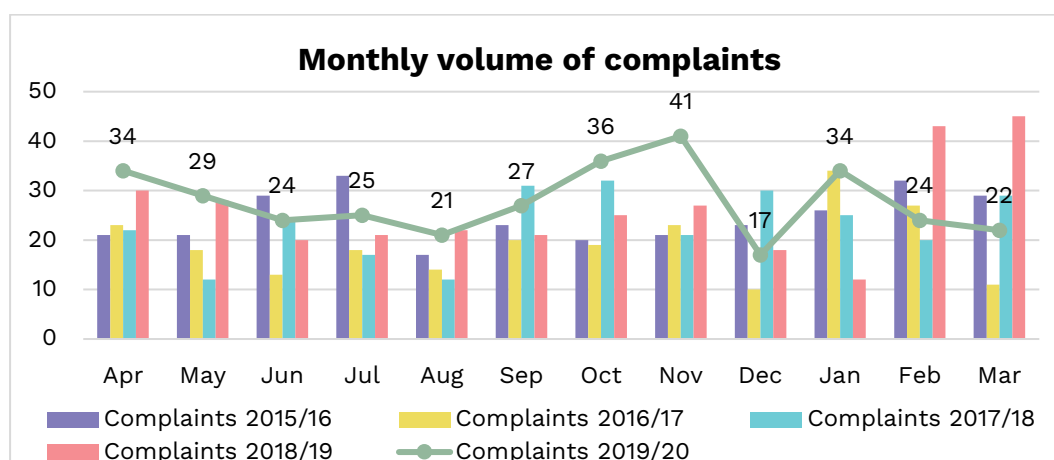
#### 3.1 Volumes



This year we recorded 334 complaints, an increase of 22 on last years' total. This increase is not a cause for concern as it represents less than 2 additional complaints each month and the increase rate has slowed to 7% from 13% last year. We continue to work closely with the business to encourage early notification of complaints, rather than dealing with issues outside the process. We view the rise as a positive and gives better insight of the issues in the business.

We operate a three stage complaints process and our aim is to resolve as many complaints as we can at stage one. 8% of complaints (27) recorded this year escalated beyond stage 1. This is the same percentage as last year. A total of 5 of these reached stage three, whereas last year only 2 reached stage 3.

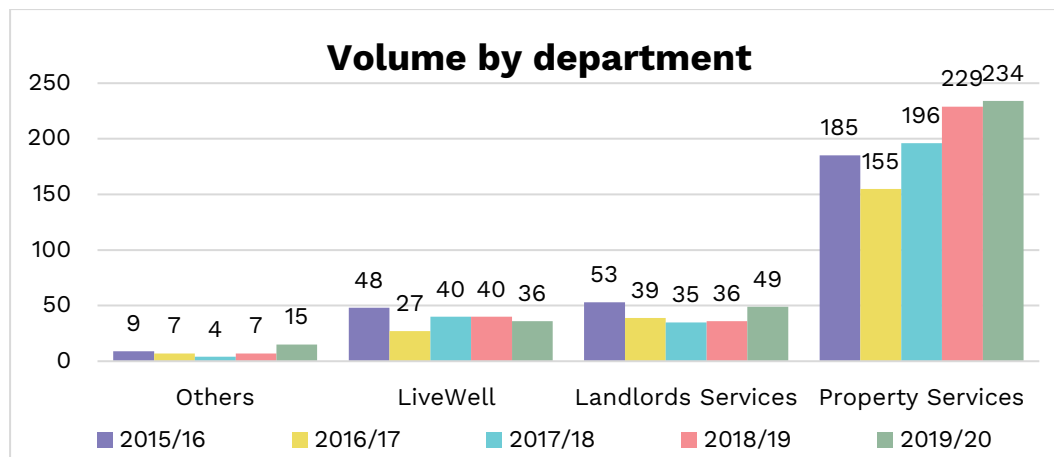
No cases have been reported to the Housing Ombudsman this year.



The graph above shows the volume of complaints by month. April's figures are high, and then we see numbers begin to reduce during the summer

months. From September onwards we start to climb again, with a higher number of complaints than usual in October, a spike in November and then a significant drop in December. This may be due to seasonal reasons, but we look at this in more detail later in the report.

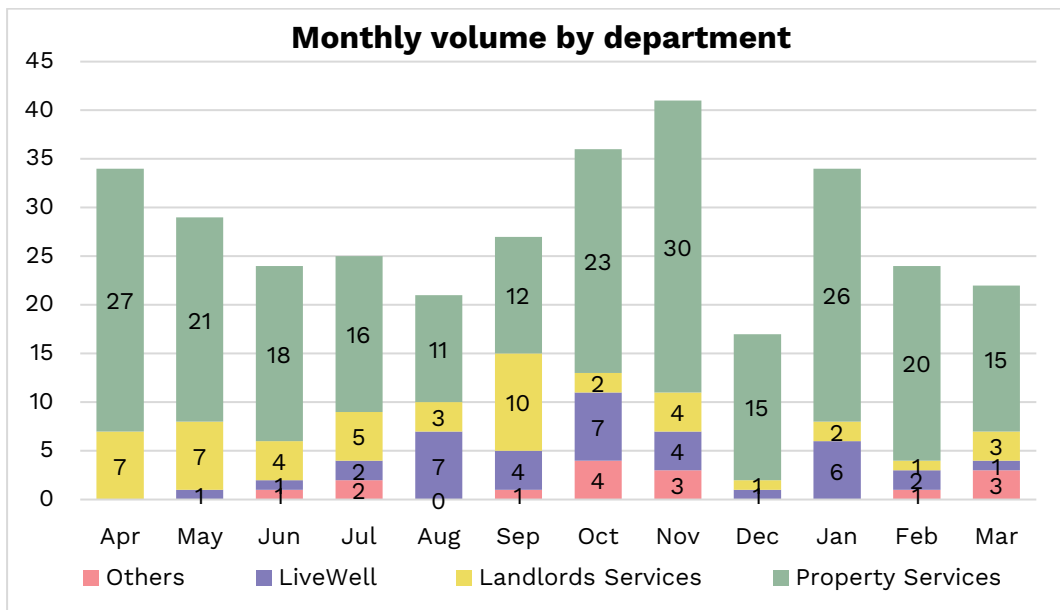
### 3.2 By Department



The graph above shows the number of complaints broken down by department. Property Services remains the highest area, accounting for 70% of all complaints, and this is typical across the sector. With a rise of just 5 complaints since last year, there is no significant change in volume.

Proportionally the greatest rise in complaints is in the 'others' category at 114%, although this only represents 8 more cases since last year. Over half of the cases in the 'others' category were Development cases.

Landlords Services cases rose by 36%, and new reporting functionality tells us that 21 of the 49 cases were allocated to Neighbourhoods (9 cases out of the 21 were complaints about the way ASB cases had been handled and the remaining 12 were a mixture with the main theme being gardens/trees/fencing), 9 were lettings related, 8 were to do with leasehold and service charges, 7 for rents and 4 were for NEAT.

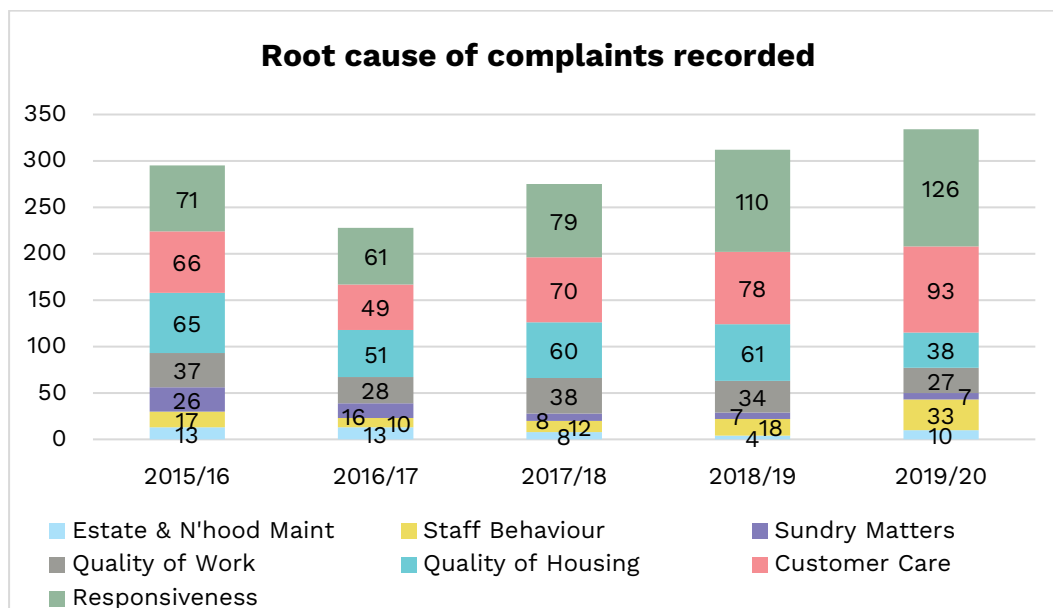


The chart above shows a comparison between each month in 2019/20 broken down by department.

Although we had the highest number of complaints all year for Property Services in November, a review of the subject of the complaints shows no common themes. It can be assumed that the approach of winter is a contributory factor as people report faulty heating systems or weather-related problems. There were also complaints in each of the other areas too, contributing to the high total for the month.

Because the highest number of complaints relate to Property Services, it is worthwhile breaking down the complaints further. An improvement that CX has given us is the functionality to report by contractor and the chart below shows this split along with any complaints that are attributable to the Property Services Department.

### 3.3 Causes



This year we see an increase of 16 on Responsiveness and 15 on Customer Care.

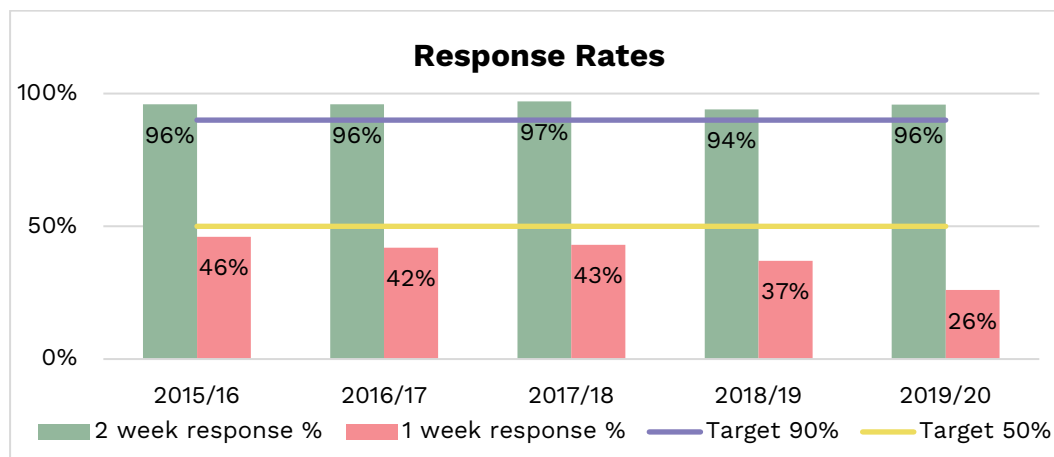
Of the 126 complaints where the root cause was Responsiveness 113 (90%) were logged against Property Services and these tended to be around delays in completing repairs or updating customers.

Of the complaints where customer care was the root cause, 45% were recorded against Property Services and these generally related to a lack of, or poor communication by contractors or staff.

The root cause of 33 complaints was staff behaviour. 30% of these related to the behaviour of contractors.

Pleasingly there is a reduction of 23 on quality of housing, and estate and neighbourhood maintenance and quality of work remain low.

### 3.4 Response times



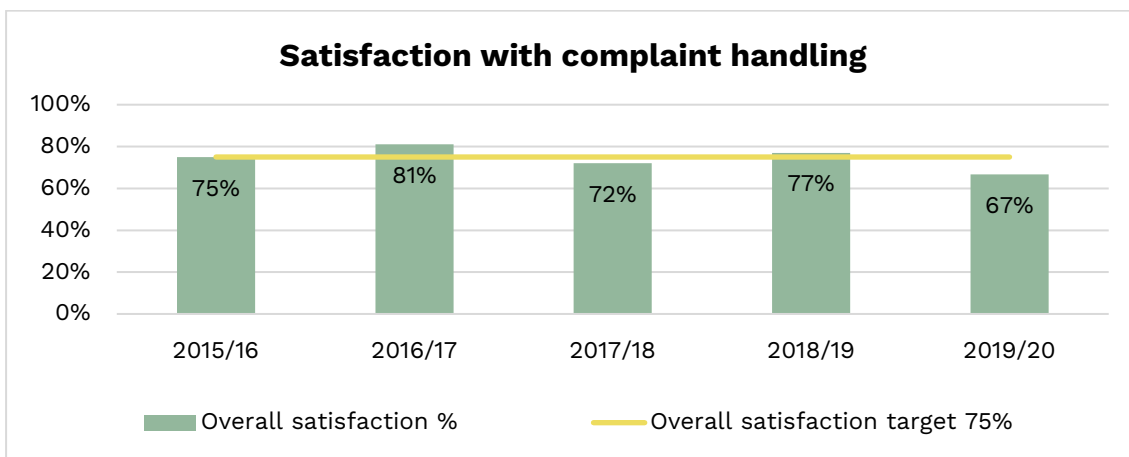
Our target is to respond to 90%+ of complaints within two weeks or a mutually agreed extended deadline. We achieved this target in 96% of cases, but we are concerned about the number of deadline extensions that are included in that 96%, and therefore go beyond the two weeks.

We have carried out some analysis which has found that 37% of those complaints are delayed, sometimes without agreement with the customer. Clearly in some circumstances there will be reasons for needing a longer period to respond, but there is good evidence to link satisfaction with complaint handling with a speedy response and good communication throughout the process and so we need to focus case managers on responding within two weeks unless there is a legitimate reason not to

We also have a stretch target to respond to 50%+ of complaints within one week; to help improve overall customer satisfaction. During the last year we achieved a disappointing 26%.

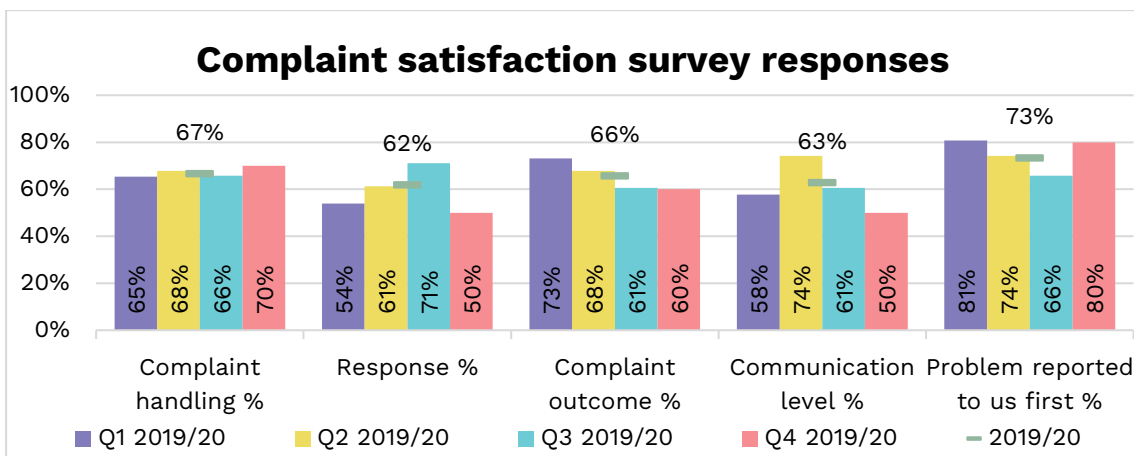
Those who fail to meet the deadline are required to report to Directors.

### 3.5 Customer satisfaction



Once a complaint has closed, we survey the customer about how we have dealt with it. Across the year we collected data from 29% of the customers who raised a complaint with us (this figure is lower than we hoped, as we suspended surveys due to the Covid 19 pandemic). The graph above shows that overall satisfaction with how we have handled the complaint has fallen by 10% since 2018/19. This is below our overall satisfaction target of 75%.

In order to understand where we can improve, the graph below shows satisfaction with our handling, response, level of communication and the complaint outcome in 2019/20. We also ask if the problem was reported to us prior to a complaint being made.



In terms of complaint prevention, it is interesting to see that across the year, 73% of people said that they had already reported the problem to us, potentially giving us the opportunity to resolve the issue before it escalated into a complaint.

We also collect the customer's own comments on the case. Many reflect what we have already acknowledged in the report – that communication and timescales could be improved, but we also received positive comments

about the way complaints cases have been handled and resolved to the customer's satisfaction along with praise for complaint managers.

Although satisfaction with the complaint outcome is likely to depend on whether the complaint was found in favour of the complainant or not, we aim to see an improvement in the other areas in 2020-21 and will work with the business to achieve this.

### **3.6 Complaint management and support**

The Performance Team is committed to supporting the business in the successful management of complaints.

The Customer Liaison Officer receives the initial complaint (and any escalations), records and allocates to a case manager. Throughout the process, he provides support to the case manager in relation to arranging any meetings, liaising with the complainant when appropriate, assisting with the response (providing guidance and quality checks), recording the outcomes on the housing system and meeting deadlines.

The Performance and Engagement Manager and the Customer Liaison Officer meet on a monthly basis to review recent complaints. We look at how the complaint was handled and what improvements we can make and feed back to the business.

During this year we have worked with areas of the business to promote the recording of complaints. For example, the Customer Liaison Officer attended a Working Win team meeting to talk about the process and he has spent time with new managers to ensure that they are comfortable with managing a complaint.

We have supported the Customer Contact Team (they are the first point of contact for receiving a good proportion of complaints) to ensure that they understand the process, producing a short training session to help them.

Feedback from some managers suggested that they found updating CX the housing system complex, so we have produced simple how-to guidance to help them.

Previously we met with the Housing Services Director to take a detailed look at a handful of complaints and identify any practical improvements we can apply across the business. We also provided the Director with a sample of response letters so that they can make a quality assurance review. We hope to continue to work closely with the new Housing Services Director on the management of complaints.



#### 4. Diversity Data

We have compared the diversity characteristics of complainants with our current customer base (current tenancy holders). We hold data on the following: age, gender, faith and belief; race, sexual orientation and disability.

The data we hold on Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Customers is shown below. The complainant profile is broadly similar to our customer profile which gives us reassurance that our process is inclusive.

Race	Number SYHA	Percentage SYHA	Number Complainants	Percentage Complainants
Unknown	3158	62.07%	196	58.7%
White: British	1558	30.62%	117	35.0%
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	46	0.9%	5	1.5%
Black: African	75	1.47%	3	0.9%
Refused	14	0.28%	3	0.9%
White: Other	67	1.32%	3	0.9%
Mixed: White & Asian	6	0.12%	2	0.6%
White: Irish	5	0.1%	2	0.6%
Asian/Asian British: Any Other Asian Background	26	0.51%	1	0.3%
Asian/Asian British: Indian	6	0.12%	1	0.3%
Other Ethnic Group: Arab	11	0.22%	1	0.3%
Any other Ethnic Group	1	0.02%		
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	6	0.12%		
Black: Any Other Black/African/Caribbean background	13	0.26%		
Black: Caribbean	30	0.59%		
Did not answer the question	2	0.04%		
Mixed: Other	14	0.28%		
Mixed: White & Black African	3	0.06%		
Mixed: White & Black Caribbean	16	0.31%		
Other Ethnic Group: Other	24	0.47%		
Other White: Any other mixed/Multiple	2	0.04%		
Other White: White and Black Caribbean	2	0.04%		
Prefer not to say	2	0.04%		
White: Gypsy/ Irish Traveller	1	0.02%		

The other aspects of our diversity data are also similar when we compare our complainant profile with our customer profile, so the detail provided below is only where it differs or highlights something of interest:

- The highest proportion of complainants are in the 25 – 34 range at 21% and only account for 17% of our customer base. Customers over 65 years old form 22% of our customer base, but account for only 14% of our complainants. We would be keen to explore why our older customers are less likely to make complaints and to ensure our communication channels are appropriate.

- We do not hold data on disability for over 99% of our customers, but interestingly, of the 31 customers who have told us they consider themselves to have a disability, 9 of them (29%) made a complaint. We would suggest that this merits further investigation.

The gaps in our diversity data make it difficult to carry out detailed analysis but understand that this is an area that the business will be taking forward.

Although not strictly diversity data, we would be keen to carry out further analysis around our customer profile, for example looking at whether customers in certain geographical areas are more likely to make complaints or whether complainants typically have other ongoing issues such as arrears or ASB so that we can review their case holistically.

## **5. Next steps**

In March we were hit with the unprecedented situation brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic. The impact main impact of Covid 19 has been a significant reduction in complaints. In April we recorded just 7 complaints for the month – a new all-time low, and in May there were 16. We know that a significant number of complaints are linked to repairs and so we believe this is due to us focusing on carrying out emergency repairs.

Homeworking has positively challenged the way that we have done some things within the complaints process. Here are some that we have identified:

- We can manage complaints effectively using Office 365 technology – we are using ‘Chat’ more often on Teams and find we are getting quicker responses than via email.
- Our default was to send acknowledgement and response letters by post. We are now using email whenever we can. This really quickens the complaints process for both the customer and us and makes small savings.
- We are trialling holding our next stage three complaint hearing remotely. Learning from the trial will shape how we hold these hearings in future. We know some people will still prefer to meet face to face, but offering the option of doing it remotely gives the customer more choice and convenience, and would speed up this stage.

As I mentioned at the start of this report, in 2020/21 we are prioritising reviewing our approach to complaint handling. We will continue doing the things that serve our customers well and feed the learning on how we have adapted to dealing with Covid 19 into our review of the complaints process.

The customer portal will offer significant opportunities to change how we manage complaints. Customers will be able to view and manage aspects of their tenancy online, it will offer greater transparency and could expedite the process significantly.

We know that having a successful complaints policy and process means focusing on what our customers want, and although we have an insight into this from our surveys, the new Customer Collaboration team will be working with customers to get to grips with what great looks like for our customers. Launch of the Y1 strategy intervention on 'Doing the Basics Brilliantly' will help us focus on the areas that matter most to our customers. Defining brilliant basics, and having a robust way of evaluating performance against these basics will be a key driver for improving our performance. We will ensure that we consider the diversity characteristics of our customers when carrying out this piece of work.

## **6. Conclusion**

There are several key themes coming from this report:

- The reduction of avoidable complaints i.e. issues which have been reported to us first or are within our control such as poor communication.
- The way in which we handle complaints, particularly in relation to communication with the customer and speed of response.
- The resourcing of the complaints service throughout busier periods or staffing challenges without compromising service levels.
- The need to work closely with contractors to share learning from complaints and reduce common issues. Where repeated issues persist, we will use contract management processes.

The data gathered will be shared with Directors to explore the themes and trends with their Department Heads, and to use it to drive better performance, both inside and outside of the business by the commissioning of service reviews/deep dives.

This, in conjunction with the work with our customers will mean a year significant changes for the Complaints Process which we look forward to sharing with you.