
South Yorkshire Housing Association

Board of Management

28 July 2021

Annual Review of Complaints 2020/21

1. Recommendation

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

2. Executive summary

This report covers complaints recorded in 2020/21 and compares with the previous four years where appropriate. In addition, it provides data on the volume and types of complaints recorded, our response timescales and the feedback we gather on cases. In summary, the key points to note are:

- We experienced a significantly lower number of complaints in 2020/21 when compared to previous years. This may be the result of delivering a lower number of services due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Property Services remain the department with the highest number of complaints in the year. However, there were reductions in complaints across other areas, such as LiveWell, Landlord Services, and Development.
- Responsiveness, customer care, and housing quality were the highest reasons for the root cause of complaints. Work is underway through our Digital First strategy and revised Complaints Policy to tackle some of these root causes to get it right the first time for our customers and take a swifter response when things go wrong.
- Our response time of two weeks has been significantly affected by the pandemic. Lockdowns meant that non-emergency maintenance issues could not be inspected within our two-week timescale, and many customers asked to keep complaints open beyond this.
- Our complaints data suggests our process is inclusive; however, we have more work to do in this area as outlined in the report.

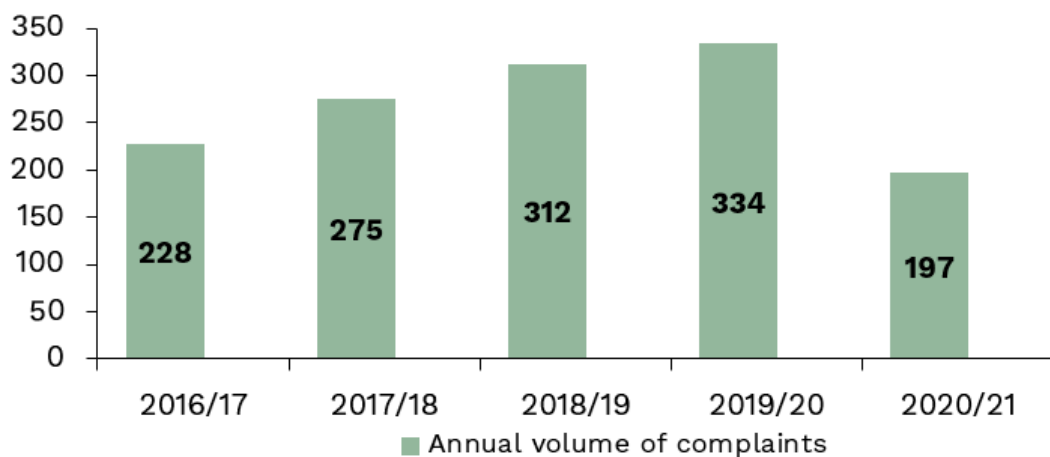
In last year’s Board paper, we talked about forming the Customer Connect team, the Social Housing White Paper, and introducing our customer portal. This year has seen the restructure of the Customer Connect team and the establishment of the Customer Experience team. In addition, we are reviewing our Complaints Policy, and our Digital First work is ongoing.

Living with the global pandemic through 2020/21 had impacted what we have seen about complaints, and through the findings, you will see that we have flagged where we think it has had an impact.

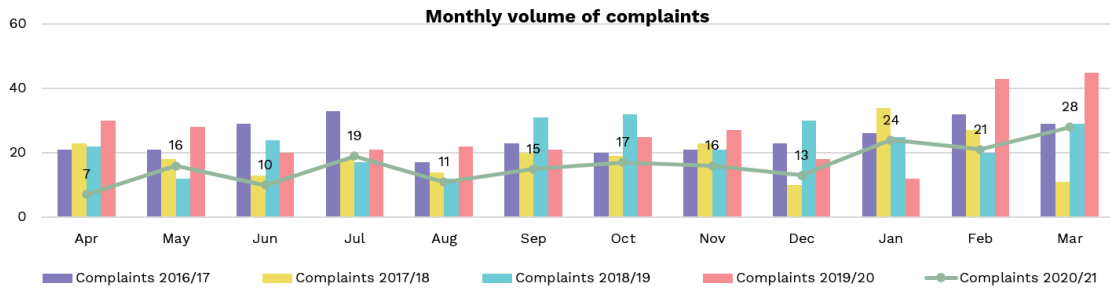
3. Complaints data, findings, and feedback

In this section, we share the data, findings, and feedback, and in section 4, you will find information about how we are using the data and feedback. Unfortunately, HouseMark benchmarking data is not yet available for 2020/21; therefore, we have not been able to carry out any benchmarking with other organisations.

3.1 Number of complaints and when they were received

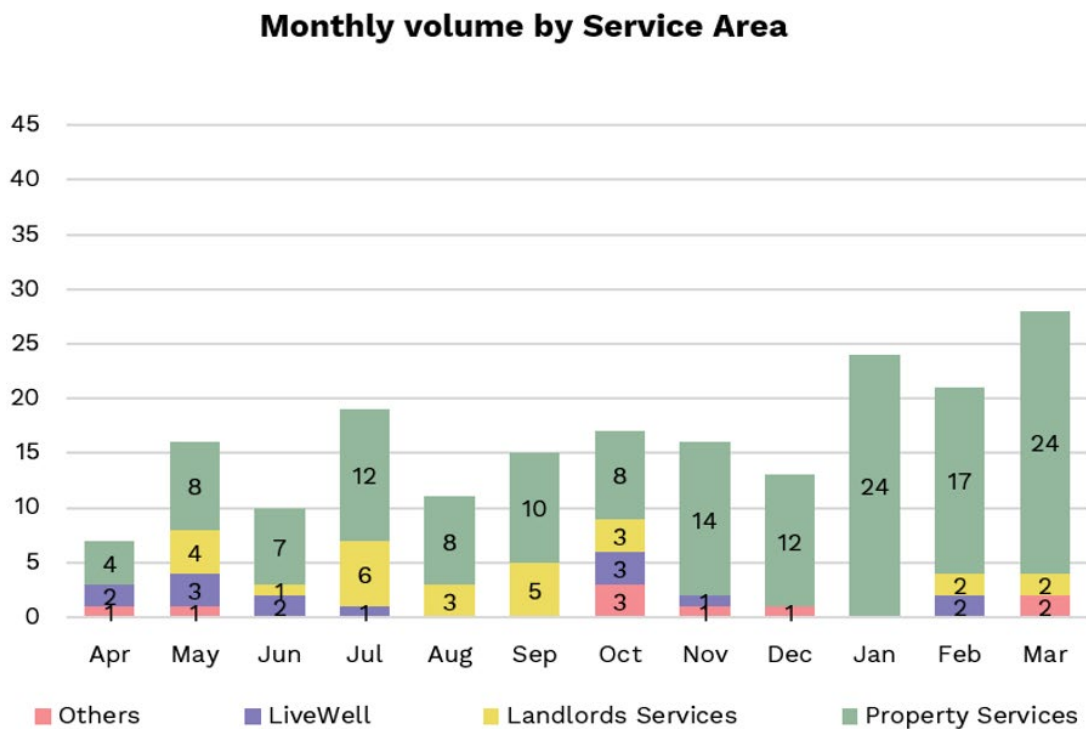


We have seen a decrease in the number of complaints from last year by 137. But, again, we attribute the drop to the global pandemic as we saw proportionally significant reductions in the number of complaints recorded in the lockdown months of April, May, June, and December 2020.



Our existing complaints policy involves three stages. We aim to resolve as many complaints as we can at stage one. However, 13% of complaints (25) this year went beyond stage 1; this is a 5% increase from last year. One complaint reached stage 3, whereas last year we had five that reached stage 3. We did not have any complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman in 2020/21.

3.2 Complaints by Service Area



75% of all complaints were Property Services related. Usually, this area experiences the highest number of complaints across the sector, given the volume of interactions with customers and their homes. In line with the overall reduction in complaints, the number of Property Services related complaints reduced from 234 in 2019/20 to 148 in 2020/21. This is surprising given we had to limit our repairs services due to Covid-19 restrictions.

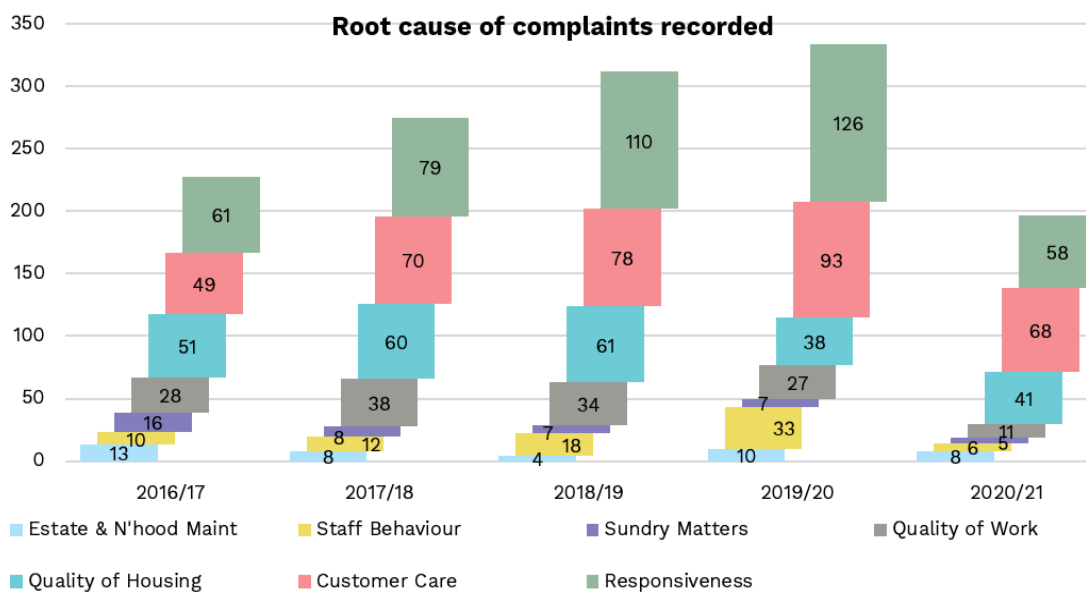
The most significant decrease by service area came in LiveWell with a 63% decrease in complaints with only 13 complaints versus last year's figure of 36. Others (mainly Development Services) saw a 46% decrease on last year's figure of 15 complaints with only 8 complaints this year. Finally, landlord Services saw a 44% decrease with 27 complaints versus the previous year's figure of 49.

As the highest number of complaints relates to Property Services, we have analysed these complaints further. Although we recorded the highest number of complaints in January and March, a review of the subject of the complaints shows no common themes. We believe that the cold winter month of January is a contributory factor as people report faulty heating systems or weather-related problems. March can be attributed to the third UK lockdown and our inability to carry out some maintenance work due to UK restrictions and people experiencing delays for routine repairs.

The Property Services Team received 57% (85) of all complaints recorded against the Property Services Service Area. This was 41% vs last year. 45% of these were to do with Responsiveness, and 36% were related to the Quality of Housing. This is explored in more detail further into the report.

An improvement that our housing management Cx system has given us is the functionality to also report by the contractor.

3.3 Causes



Responsiveness remains the single highest root cause of our complaints with 58 last year accounting for 29% of our overall complaints. However, this is 9% down on overall proportion of complaints from last year's figure of 34% of complaints. The 21% of complaints where the reason was Quality of Housing were a total of 41 complaints out of the 197 total. These can be broken down as such:

- 16 related to multiple boiler/heating/hot water failures
- 9 related to the spread of damp/mould
- 4 related to insulation concerns notably doors and windows
- 4 related to reoccurring leaks/water ingress
- 3 related to roofing/flooring disrepair
- 2 related to infestations (rats and pigeons)
- 2 relates to electrical/aerial problems
- 1 related to drainage problems

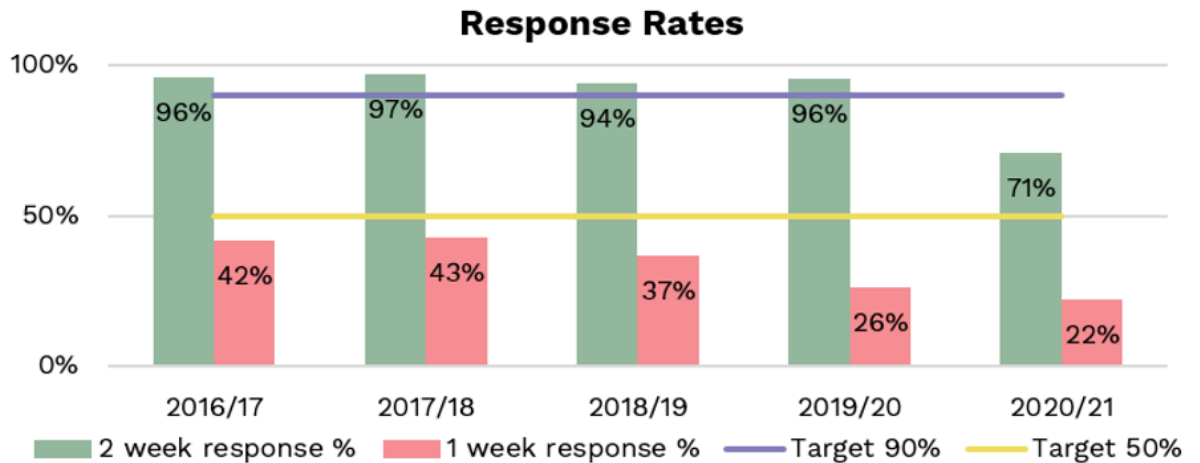
We paid compensation on 2 of the 41 complaints at a total of £210.72.

We are currently working through a review around our approach to damp, mould, and condensation from an asset-based, organisation culture, and customer experience perspective.

In relation to boiler/heating failures, in the last three months, we have introduced a recall code on boiler repair jobs to identify recurring problems easier, influencing our ability to be more proactive with anything that could lead to a complaint. In addition, when a boiler is repaired for the 3rd time, we now have an escalation process that should allow us to be more proactive. We also recorded 10 (or 24%) learning complaints last year around 'ordering and turnaround' of parts about heating repairs.

It has been a challenging year to deliver a repairs service, which is reflected in our complaints. Customers initially understood the temporary changes to the repairs service brought about by the pandemic. However, as the year progressed, people began to get more frustrated as they waited for repairs because of the pause on routine maintenance and how we were prioritising new repair requests whilst dealing with the backlog. Some repairs also had to be delayed due to the difficulty we had in obtaining materials.

3.4 Response times

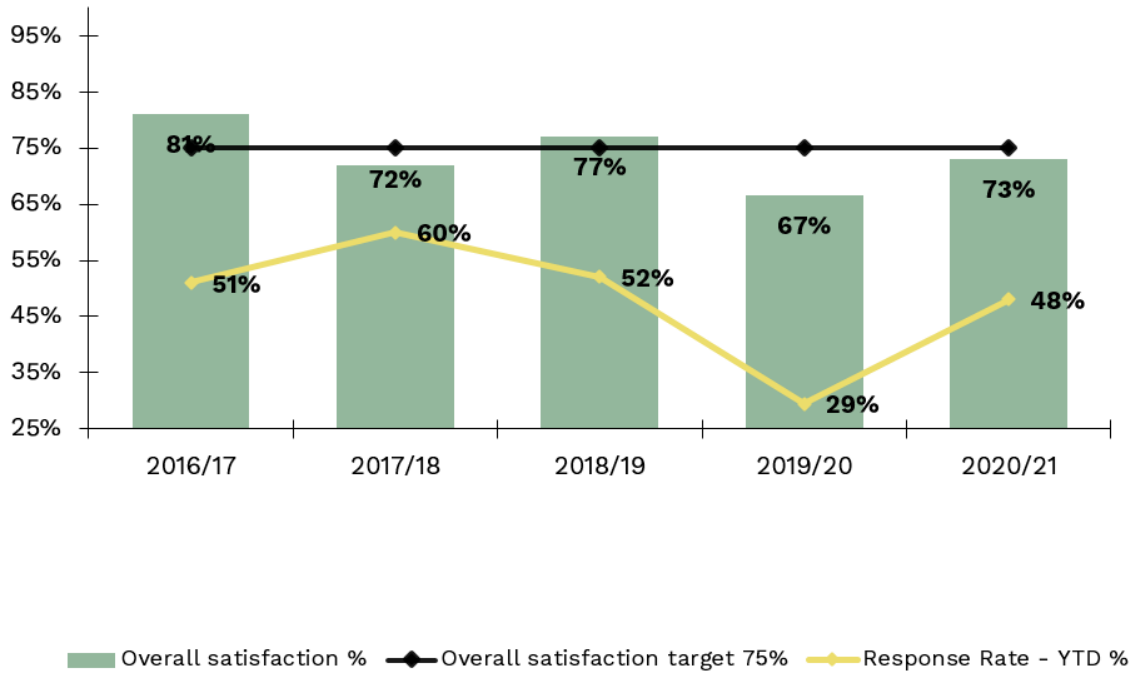


Our target is to respond to 90%+ of complaints within two weeks or a mutually agreed extended deadline and to respond to 50%+ of complaints within one week. Disappointingly, we ended the year below target with 71% of cases responded to within two weeks. The root cause of this significant reduction in response is the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically our ability to visit homes and carry out visual inspections of non-emergency related repairs. In most cases, customers asked to keep their complaints open way beyond the two weeks, meaning that we would not meet our 90%+ target. We extended 25% of cases with the permission of the customer. Other issues that prevented us from fully responding to complaints within two weeks was the availability of parts for repair issues and delayed responses from our contractors.

We will be tackling this through the approach we are rolling out to deliver our new complaints policy. It will encourage more conversation with customers, a better acknowledgement of customer contact, and more support from the Customer Connect team regarding response performance. We are also moving away from letters to digital communications, which will speed up response times.

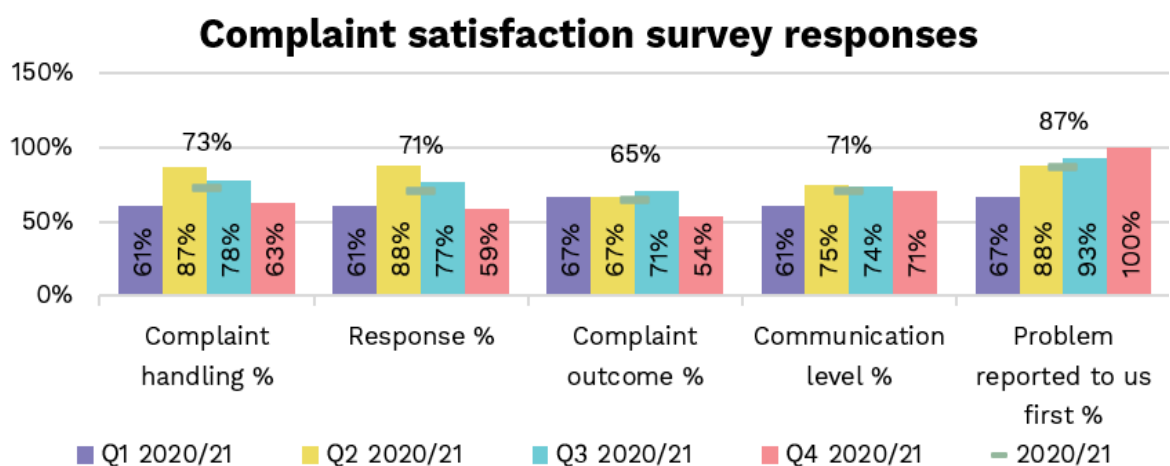
3.5 Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction with complaint handling



Once a complaint is closed, we survey the customer about how we have handled their complaint. We received satisfaction data from 48% of the people who complained to us, increasing last year’s response rate by 29%. It is also encouraging to see that our overall satisfaction score for handling complaints rose 6% to 73%, just short of our target of 75%.

The graph below shows satisfaction with our handling, response, level of communication and the complaint outcome in all four quarters last year and overall for 2020/21.



We also asked if customers reported the problem to us before they made a complaint to identify any proactive or preventative action that we could have

taken. 87% of people said they had reported the problem to us first, potentially allowing us to resolve the issue before it escalated - a 14% increase from last year. One of the ways we are tackling this is by piloting a quick resolution approach for contacts handled via our Customer Connect team.

We also collect any general customer's comments. We received positive feedback about how complaints cases have been handled, resolved to the customer's satisfaction, and received praise for complaint managers. However, some also reflected what we have already acknowledged in the report - that we could improve communication and timescales.

3.6 Diversity Data

We hold data on age, gender, faith and belief, race, sexual orientation, and disability for tenancy holders. We have compared the diversity characteristics of people that complained in 2020/21 alongside the data we hold on current tenancy holders. The data we hold on Black, Asian, and Ethnically Diverse Customers are shown below. The complainant profile for 2020/21 is broadly like our customer profile, which gives some reassurance that our process is inclusive.

Race	Number SYHA	Percentage SYHA	Number Complainants	Percentage Complainants
Unknown	871	14.71%	28	14.1%
White: British	4056	68.52%	140	70.7%
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	151	2.55%	4	2.0%
Black: African	173	2.92%	5	2.5%
Refused	2	0.03%	1	0.5%
White: Other	167	2.82%	3	1.5%
Mixed: White & Asian	12	0.2%	1	0.5%
White: Irish	17	0.28%		
Asian/Asian British: Any Other Asian Background	82	1.38%	2	1.0%
Asian/Asian British: Indian	12	0.2%	1	0.5%
Other Ethnic Group: Arab				
Any other Ethnic Group				
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	40	0.67%		
Black: Any Other Black/African/Caribbean background	34	0.57%	3	1.5%
Black: Caribbean	74	1.25%	2	1.0%
Did not answer the question	71	1.19%	3	1.5%
Mixed: Other	1	0.01%		
Mixed: White & Black African	15	0.25%		
Mixed: White & Black Caribbean	1	0.01%		
Other Ethnic Group: Other	85	1.43%	1	0.5%
Other White: Any other mixed/Multiple	3	0.05%	1	0.5%
Other White: White and Black Caribbean	44	0.74%	3	1.5%
Prefer not to say	6	0.1%		
White: Gypsy/ Irish Traveller	2	0.03%		

Recently, many media articles concerning poor quality of housing and disrepair have been aired, and most news reports have involved customers from BAME ethnic backgrounds. We have commissioned work to explore whether ethnicity is a factor in our customers who have raised issues relating to housing quality and whether any organisation culture or unconscious bias is a contributing factor.

4. Responding to the findings and feedback

The findings and feedback identify several areas where we know we can make improvements. They are:

- Responsiveness
- Improving satisfaction with how a complaint has been handled
- Resolving more at the first opportunity
- More focus on learning from complaints
- Accessibility and potential under-reporting – making sure it is easy for all customers to complain and that they are dealt with and recorded

Each of these areas has already been identified as an area for improvement in the work we have been doing on our new complaints policy and improving how we handle complaints.

5. A new Complaints Policy and improving how we handle complaints

We have now signed off our new Complaints Policy, which identifies several areas for improving our approach to engaging and working with customers when our performance has fallen short, or we have not met customer expectations. In addition to the policy, we are also running a project on improving complaint handling overall. Now that the Board has approved the policy, we aim to roll out the new policy and improved approach by the end of the summer. A summary of the improvements we are making that will tackle the areas for improvement that the findings have flagged includes:

- Reducing complexity and making it more straightforward for customers to raise and rectify problems before it is necessary to make a complaint
- Make it straightforward to complain and let us know if they are not satisfied with our response to their complaint.
- Improve customer information and communication and increasing transparency.
- Reduce complexity and making it more straightforward for colleagues to deal with complaints. We are working up a comprehensive set of targeted, easy-to-use guides.
- Our Customer Experience team will be working closely with complaint owners and reviewers to embed new ways of working to achieve consistent quality.
- Piloting a 'Quick Resolutions' approach to try and put things right more quickly and before a customer feels they have to escalate their issue to a complaint to get it dealt with.
- Improve our learning from complaints, including gathering more insightful customer data and greater scrutiny from them on our performance.
- Give the Senior Management Team timely data and information to manage best what is happening in their service area.

5.1 Diversity and Accessibility

As part of the project, we have completed an Equality Impact Assessment on the new approach, and we think we can do more to make sure our complaints approach is accessible and publicise how to make a complaint.

This year we will be working with our Race and Diversity Lead on accessibility, and a reasonable adjustments approach.

6. Looking forward

After a year like no other for our customers and South Yorkshire Housing Association, we aim for a year of significant change for the complaints process and overall customer satisfaction this coming year.

As we roll out improved ways of working, we will regularly review that they are resulting in improvements. In addition, we will be soliciting and listening to feedback from customers and colleagues on how things are working and will be quick on our feet and agile in adapting approaches if they are not achieving improved results.

We look forward to sharing with you next year the difference we have made.