

Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2017



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Executive Summary

As requested by the Chairman of Policy and Resources Committee, this is an annual report detailing the level of complaints received in relation to services delivered by the Council for the last financial year – **April 2016 to March 2017**. This is an information item for all members and will be published on the Council's website.

The Council received a reduced number of complaints in 2016/17, a total of 868 over the year, compared to 924 for the previous financial year 15/16. The Council received 341 formal compliments from residents regarding services over the same period.

Between April 2016 and March 2017 two complaints against the Council were upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman. In the previous year one case was upheld by the Ombudsman.

The Council managed 693,340 customer transactions over the financial year.

Background

The Council has a three stage complaints management process as set out in the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy. This approach enables the authority to do everything it can to resolve complaints in line with agreed policies and procedures prior to any referral to the Local Government Ombudsman.

This report shows the number of Stage One, Stage Two and Stage Three complaints and Ombudsman cases received during the period April 2016 - March 2017.

The Customer Service Centre (CSC) became responsible for receiving, logging and tracking all complaints about the Council and the services delivered from April 2014 via a dedicated sub-section of the Customer Services Team.

A new Complaint and Compliment handling procedure went live in April 2016 for all complaints received as part of the 'CRM (Customer Relationship Management system) standardisation' Project whereby CRM Dynamics is used to record all complaints to the organisation, enabling greater categorisation of complaints and segmentation per service area. This helps to assist more detailed analysis. The CRM is used to monitor adherence to responses within the agreed service standard and automate reminders to back office service areas, increasing the opportunity for full responses to be issued within the allocated time, delivering greater efficiency within the process.

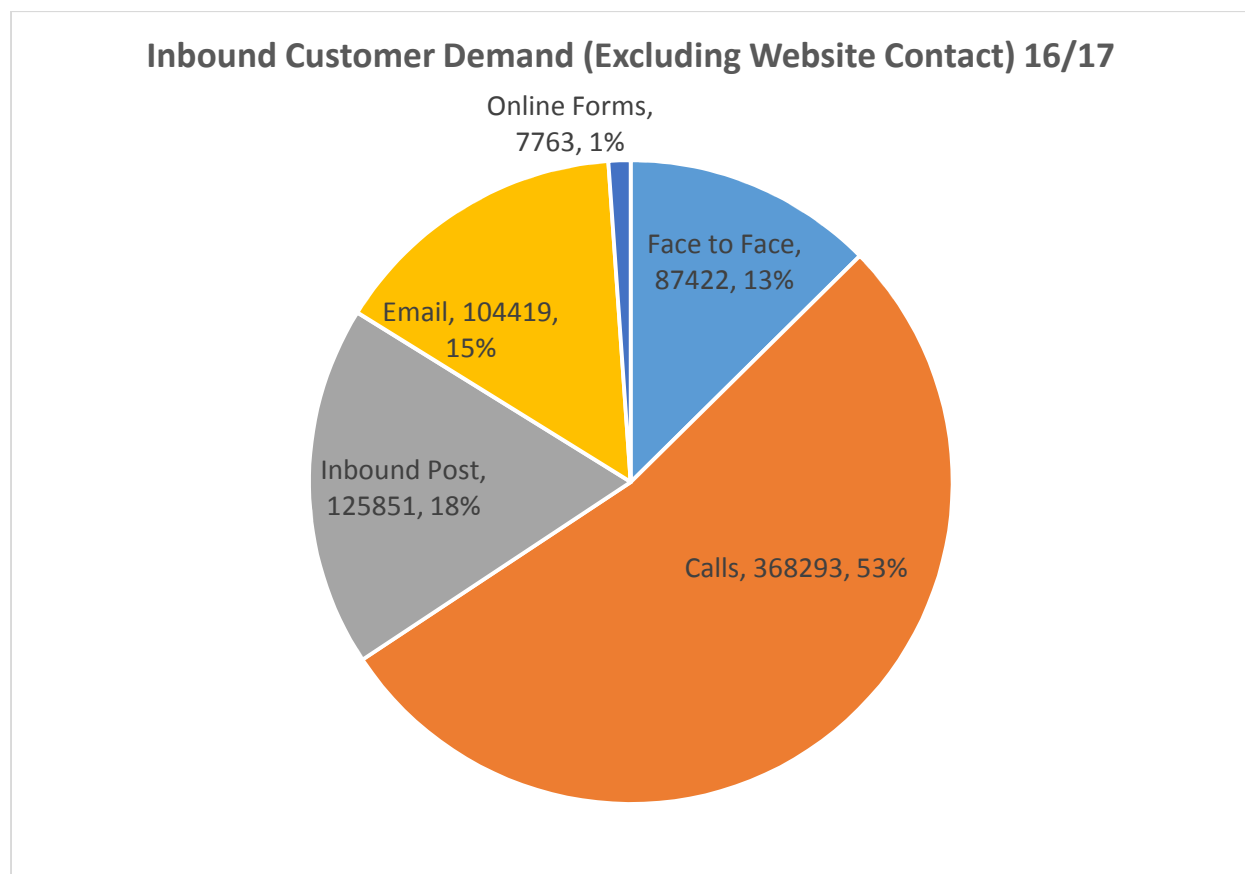
A Complaints Scrutiny Working Group met on three occasions in late 2016 and, early 2017 to help review the Council's approach to receiving Complaints, Comments, Compliments and wider customer feedback, and they conducted a review of the Council's Complaints, Comments and Compliments

Policy. This led – leading to an updated version of the Policy, which was approved in April 2017 along with, and a new accompanying procedures. This report provides statistics and analysis under the previous Policy and Procedures prior to this update.

The Council values all forms of customer feedback, including complaints, as this allows us to constantly evaluate our processes with regards to efficiency and effectiveness, which enables continuous improvement where lessons can be learned. Customers can give feedback on services through a range of channels (including Twitter, Facebook and the newly launched Complaints, Comments and Compliments web page). This also aids the design of new customer solutions to make the Council's services more accessible whilst ensuring a customer-centric culture within the Council.

Complaints In Context

The Council managed 693,340 customer transactions over the financial year, excluding the number of unique users to the Council's website. This includes inbound telephony contact, email contact, white mail correspondence and face to face visits and is broken down as follows;



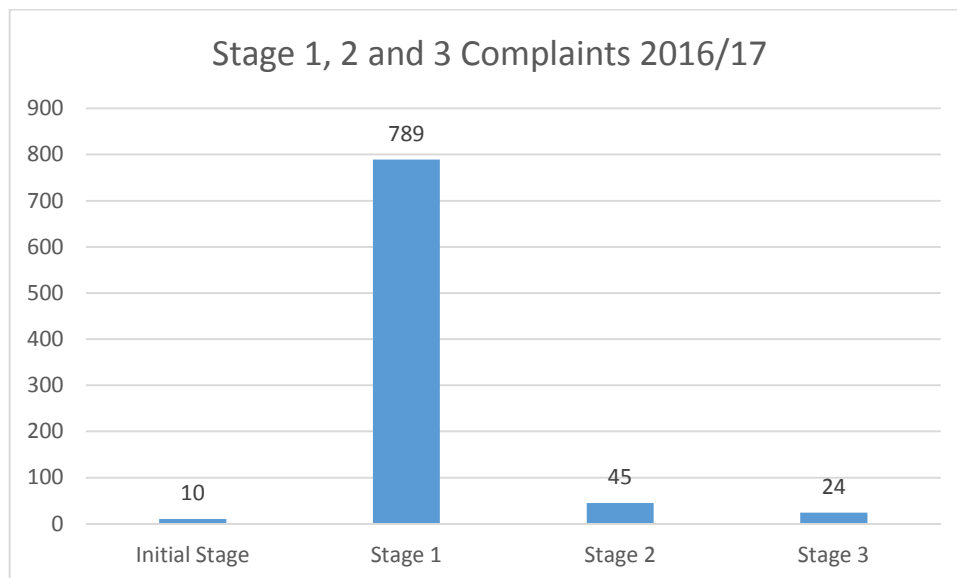
The Council received a total of 868 complaints in 2016/17 meaning that only 0.12% of contact led to a complaint being issued to the Council, a reduction on the previous year where 0.14% of contact led to a formal complaint being issued.

NUMBER OF STAGE ONE, TWO AND THREE COMPLAINTS 16/17

The following table shows the number of complaints received at Stage One, Two and Three.

10 complaints were resolved prior to a Stage One complaint being progressed – these are classified as an ‘Initial Stage’ complaint. This is now formally recognised as a Stage 0 complaint within the Council’s new Complaints, Comments and Compliments, Policy.

789 Complaints were received at Stage 1 over the year, 45 at Stage 2 and 24 complaints went to a Stage 3 Management Review.



The Council received a reduction in the number of Stage One complaints, the same number of Stage 2 Complaints and an increase in the number of Stage 3 Complaints on the previous year. The following table shows comparisons on previous years.

Complaints	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Stage One	525	862	867	789
Stage Two	12	45	45	45
Stage Three	1	15	12	24

Of the 24 Stage 3 Complaints only 6 were upheld through the Council’s independent review process, acknowledging in these instances fault and areas for improvement on the Council’s side, leading to a resolution of the matter with the complainant.

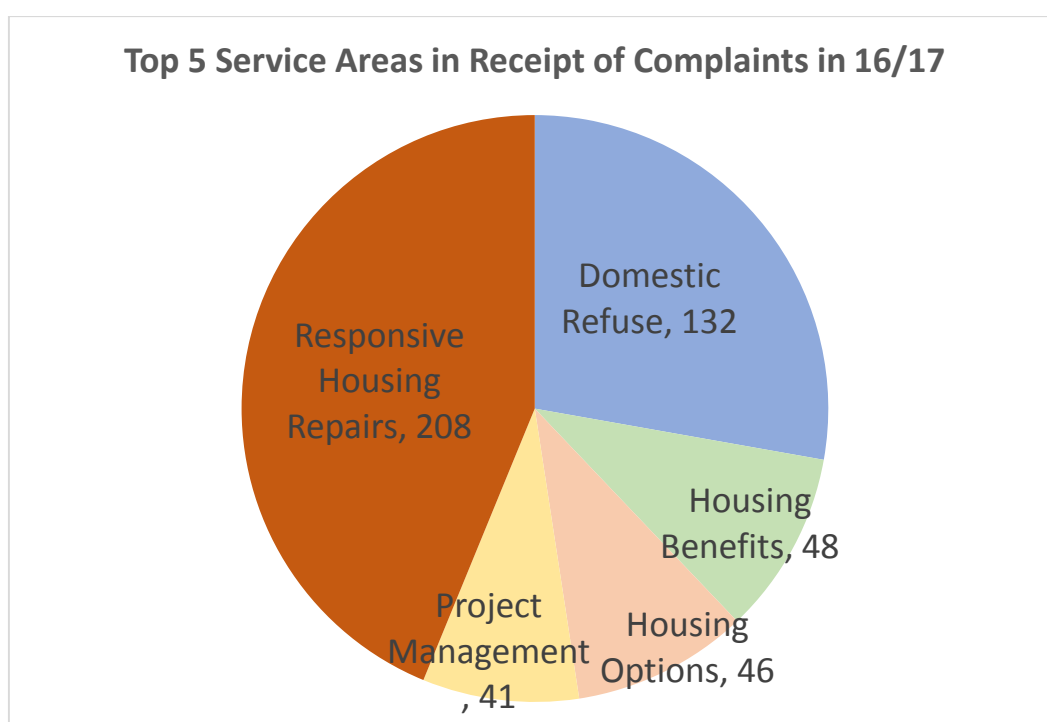
The majority of complaints which reach Stage Three result in a face to face meeting to discuss the case with an independent manager, often the Manager of Customer Services.

NATIONAL SATISFACTION CONTEXT

To put complaints in a wider national context, the UK Customer Satisfaction Index (April 2016) showed customer satisfaction has increased significantly for the first time since 2012, although the Public Sector remains one of the lowest performing sectors. Their report “Citizens and Customers: Further Building the Case for Customer Service in the Public Sector” evidences that customers have rising expectations and demands to be met, despite Public Sector organisations facing considerable financial pressures, having to manage what they would like to deliver against what they can afford to deliver. Furthermore, customer priorities have changed when compared with 5 years ago, with more importance attributed to staff attitude and behaviour than previously.

Top 5 Service Areas in Receipt of Complaint

The top five areas of complaint remain largely the same as in 2015/2016, with high transaction and visible services remaining high such as domestic refuse, project management and housing repairs. Housing Benefits and Housing Options complaints do feature more prominently than in previous years. Time taken to process Benefits Claims is identified as a key theme with complaints, as with complaints relating to the reclamation of Benefit overpayments, necessary action undertaken by the Council. Housing Options saw an increased number of complaints compared to previous years with key themes including complaints relating to the new allocations policy and the new residence eligibility criteria meaning that some customers were not eligible to apply for the Housing Register. Residents seeking to upsize properties features prominently as a theme.



The Housing Repairs service is a high transaction and highly visible service (the Council currently manages 12,6000 properties). In addition to this, in June 2016 the Council entered into a new long term Property Services contract with Morgan Sindall, with the number of complaints moderately increasing as the new contract began to mobilise and the previous contract entered the closing phases. Refuse (collection) is another highly visible, high transaction service with approximately 77,000 residences to collect from each week with the service carrying out close to 450,000 refuse collections per annum.

Domestic Refuse, Housing Options and Property Services also feature in the top 5 most complimented services.

Performance Against Service Standards

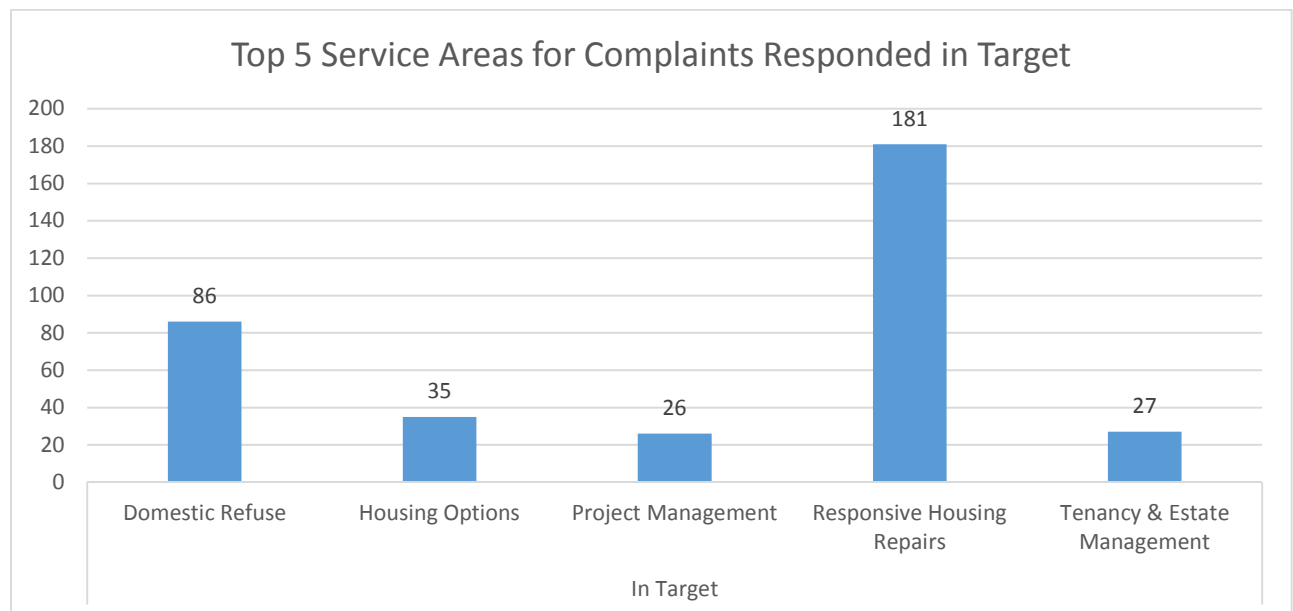
The Council has a target of responding to 80% complaints in full in 10 working days, benchmarking suggests this is a good standard, reflecting the Council's commitment to getting the basics right for

customers. For example Colchester Borough Council have a 28 Working Day Service Standard for responses and there is a 20 Day Service Standard for Chelmsford City Council from Stage Two onwards.

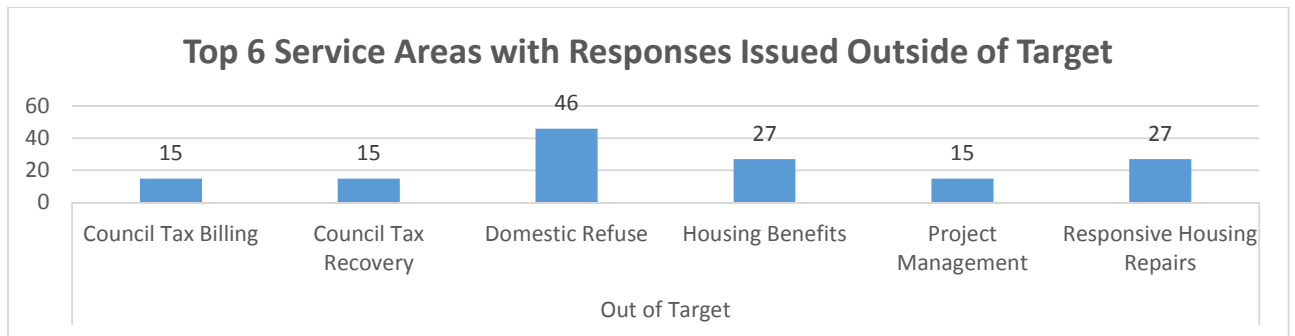
Over the last financial year 587 responses were issued within the 10 working day service standard which equates to 68%, a little short of the Council's Target performance. However, due to enhancements in the underpinning CRM technology in this area over this year Managers are now updated on the 7th and 9th day when responses are due, and customers are kept informed of any potential delays and the reasons for these.

The Customer Services team now complete a monthly report analysing complaints themes and trends, and detailing long standing outstanding cases with a view to action being taken. These reports are issued to senior management and are soon to be published on the Council's website to help improve performance and give transparency for customers.

Housing Repairs and Domestic Refuse responded to the most number of complaints within the corporate 10 working day Service Standard.



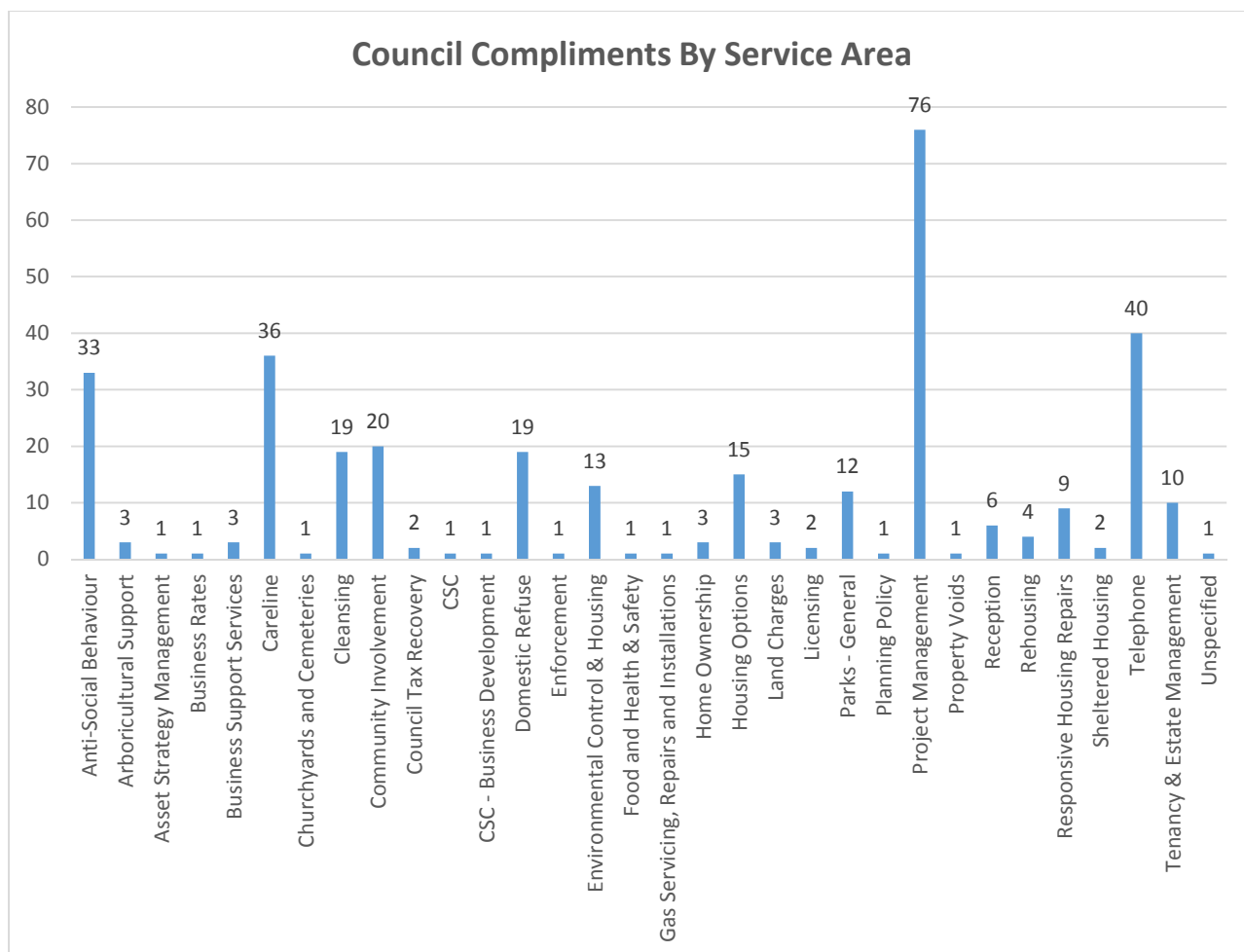
With three services having 15 responses outside of Target, a top 6 has been identified for the highest number of responses issued outside of target. These are often in the areas where there are higher demand in the number of complaints, such as with Domestic Refuse and Responsive Housing Repairs, and in more complex lines of business such as Revenues and Benefits and Project Management.



Service Compliments

It is important the Council reflects on all forms of feedback, this includes when customers formally complement Council Services, to ensure this is recognised and good customer experiences are reflected on to ensure they are sustained. The Council received 341 formal compliments over the year. The Anti-Social Behaviour Team, Careline, Community Involvement, Domestic Refuse, Project Management and CSC Telephone Teams were the highest complimented service areas. Key themes for compliments included the attitude and approach taken by Officers, Council Officers resolving complex cases – meeting customer expectations, Council officers taking ownership of issues and keeping customers informed and the high standard of work carried out either by or on behalf of the Council.

The table below provides a full list of compliments received by the Council in relation to different service areas.



Complaints Referred to the Local Government Ombudsman

Customers who reach the end of the Council’s formal complaints procedure, who remain dissatisfied, and feel there is sufficient evidence of maladministration are able to refer the case to the Local Government Ombudsman whose role it is to take an independent look at a case and provide feedback to the Council.

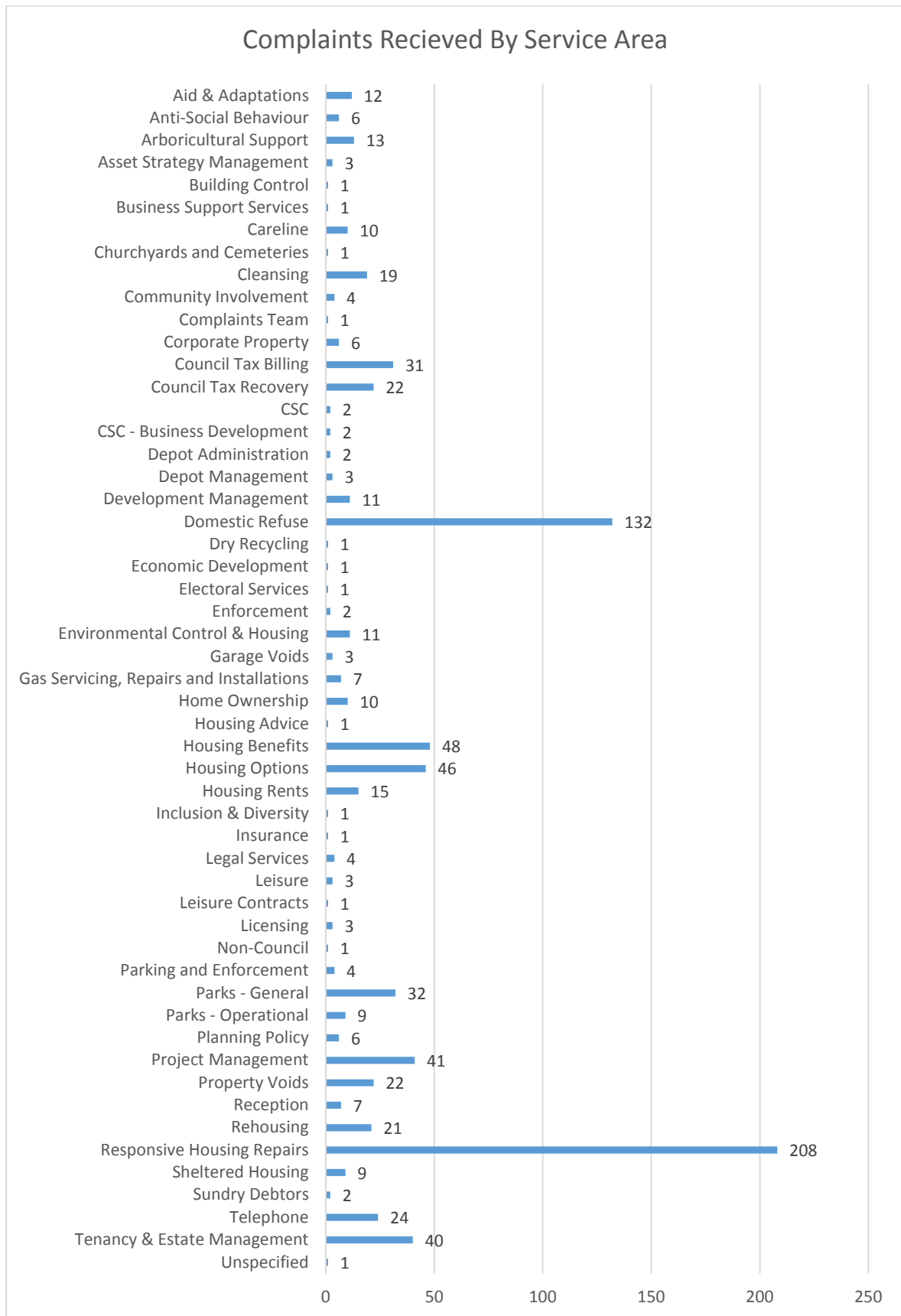
A total of 5 cases had a detailed investigation conducted by the Local Government Ombudsman in 2016/17, with cases upheld against the Council on 2 occasions. 3 cases that had detailed investigation were not upheld.

One of the upheld cases referred to the Council’s Enforcement Teams destruction of a vehicle. In this instance the DVLA had written to the registered keeper of the vehicle and said that they had no further interest in the vehicle, but did not communicate this to the enforcing authority, in this case the Council. As the DVLA is outside of the remit of the Local Government Ombudsman, they sought compensation from the Council instead of the DVLA and the matter was upheld. Compensation was issued and the matter was successfully resolved at this stage.

The second upheld case relates to the Council’s Planning Team not having considered Mr X’s contentions to a planning application. The Local Government Ombudsman acknowledged that the contentions should have been considered, but accepted that had they been considered the decision to grant the application would not have changed as it complied with Council guidelines. The Local

Government Ombudsman agreed with the Council's decision to offer nominal compensation to the complainant for time taken to raise the complaint.

Appendix One – Complaints Statistics



Appendix Two – Compliments Statistics

