

Enfield Council

Corporate Complaints Annual Report 2021 - 2022

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Suitable for publication

Executive Summary

Introduction

During 2021/22, London Borough of Enfield received 2,069 corporate complaints and 7,844 MEQs. Adults & Children's Social Care complaints are not included in this figure as these annual statutory reports are produced separately.

For corporate complaints and MEQs response time performance targets were not achieved although there were in-year performance improvements (Complaints - 77% on time responses; MEQs – 78% on time responses).

Findings

When comparing 3 year-trends, both Complaints and MEQ volumes have increased year-on-year with the highest received for both areas between April 21 to March 22. Complaint response performance time has remained broadly the same despite the increase in volume. However, MEQ volumes have significantly increased year-on-year whilst response performance has decreased.

There were reduced escalations from first to final stage complaints as well as the number of decisions upheld in favour of the complainant by the Ombudsman.

The majority of complaints related to service delivery, quality and staff conduct. High volume service areas included waste management, housing repairs, homelessness and financial support. These also represent high contact service areas (e.g. bin collections and council housing repairs) and services which have experienced significant demand increase, notably homelessness applications post Covid-19 which almost doubled compared to the previous year. Member Enquiries demonstrated significant focus on fly-tipping, resident missed bin collections as well as maintaining public spaces, preventing homelessness and traffic calming measures.

Ombudsman upheld complaints identified development opportunities to reduce service delays and improve documentation processes.

Improvement Actions

A series of corporate and individual service improvements are underway to improve response times, quality and service delivery. At an organisational level, changes to resources structures, processes and systems are being implemented and embedded throughout 22/23 to reduce initial handling delays and provide better insight informing targeted service improvements. Complaints learning from 21/22 has informed a series of specific service level action plans. These include enhanced staff training and induction programmes, service redesigns, recruitment drives and improved customer communication processes to enhance service delivery and reduce the initial complaints received.

1. Introduction

This is London Borough of Enfield's Annual Corporate Complaints report for the period of 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. It focuses on the nature of complaints received by the Council, handling performance and the learning elicited to shape future service improvements.

In addition, the report includes a summary of performance, decisions and learning from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman (HO) complaints during the same period. It also includes performance and insight regarding Members Enquiries (MEQs) submitted by Members and MPs.

Complaints regarding Adult and Children's Social Care are processed and monitored under a specific statutory framework. Consequently, these annual reports are produced separately and not included in this report.

2. Complaints Procedures

2.1 Corporate Complaints

A complaint can be wide-ranging but is broadly defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with a service provided, or lack of action by the Council or its staff which requires a response. Generally, issues brought to the Council for the first time are dealt with as a service request and are not processed as a complaint. However, these are escalated to a formal complaint if the resident/customer remains unsatisfied.

London Borough of Enfield has a two-stage internal complaints process:

- **First Stage:** We aim resolve the complaint as soon as possible and within 10 working days of acknowledgement.
- **Final Stage:** If a complainant is unsatisfied with the response, they can escalate their complaint to the final stage for further consideration. We aim to provide a response within 20 working days. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they can escalate their complaint to the relevant Ombudsman.

2.2 Ombudsman

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman (HO) are independent organisations providing impartial reviews of citizen complaints. Whilst most complaints come under the LGSCO's remit, HO deals with social housing related complaints. The Ombudsman decision is final, bringing the complaint to a close.

There are 2 stages for Ombudsman complaints:

- **Preliminary Enquiry:** Ombudsman requests original complaint and LBE responses (first and final stages). Depending on their findings they may decide to investigate the complaint further (see below).
- **Investigation Request:** Ombudsman conducts investigation (often escalation from Preliminary Enquiry stage) resulting in Ombudsman final decision, actions for Local Authority etc.

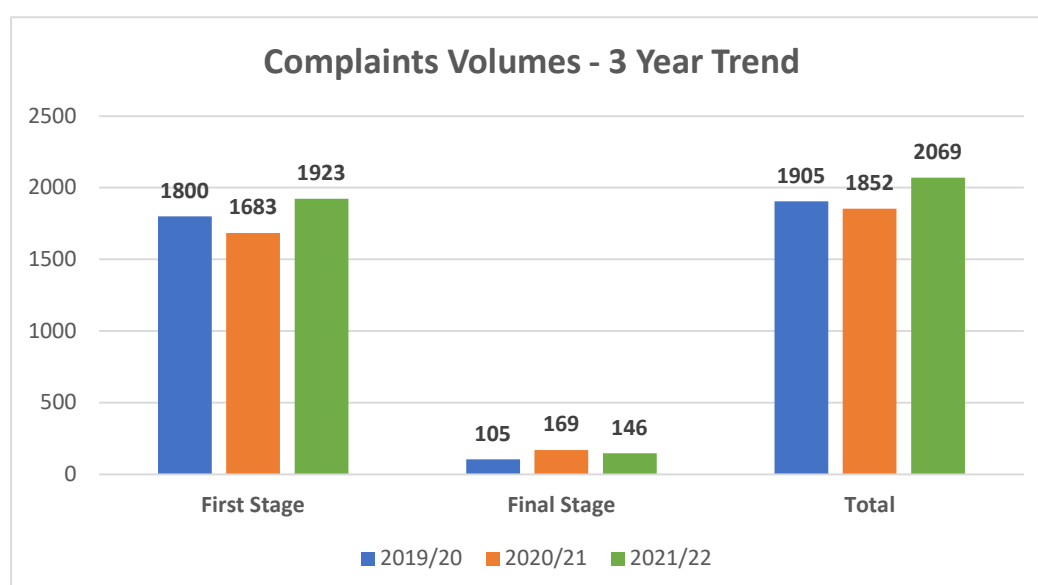
3. Corporate Complaints Analysis – 2021/22

Customer Contact Context

Serving circa 330,000 residents (6th highest in London) initial customer contact volumes alone are significant. During 2021/22, the organisation received nearly 516,000 calls, handled over 55,000 webchats and supported 22,000 customers face-to-face. Over 13 million webpages were viewed and over 114,000 online service request and payment forms submitted by customers.

In addition, the organisation collected approximately 940,000 bins per month; maintained 10,080 social housing properties; processed 83,471 Housing Benefit changes; supported 2,579 households regarding benefit and debt assistance; and processed over 4,000 homelessness applications.

3.1 Complaint Volume

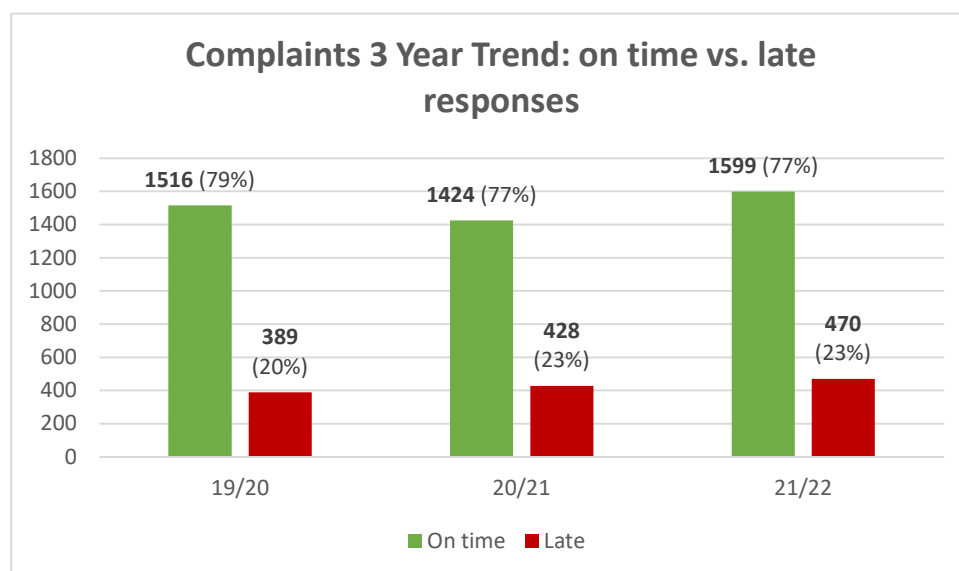


In 2021/22, the Council received 1,923 first stage and 146 final stage complaints, totalling 2,069 complaints. Compared to previous years, complaint volumes have

increased, although final stage volumes have decreased slightly. This demonstrates an improvement in successfully resolving complaints at the initial stage. It should be noted that the category approach changed in 2020/21 from 3 stages to 2 stages. Therefore, 2019/20 data is harder to compare with 20/21 and 21/22.

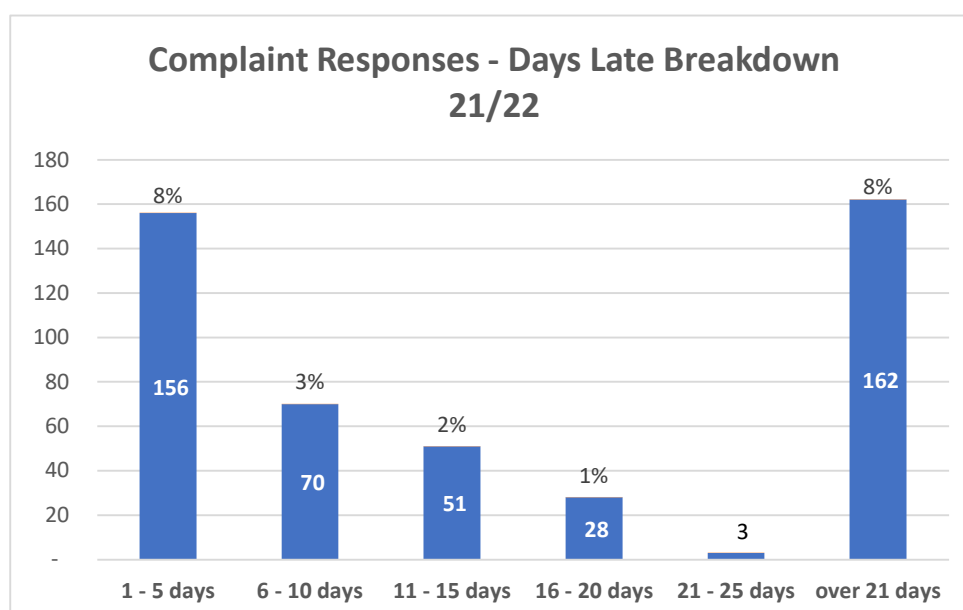
3.2 Response Timescale Performance

The Council aims to answer 95% of complaints on time.



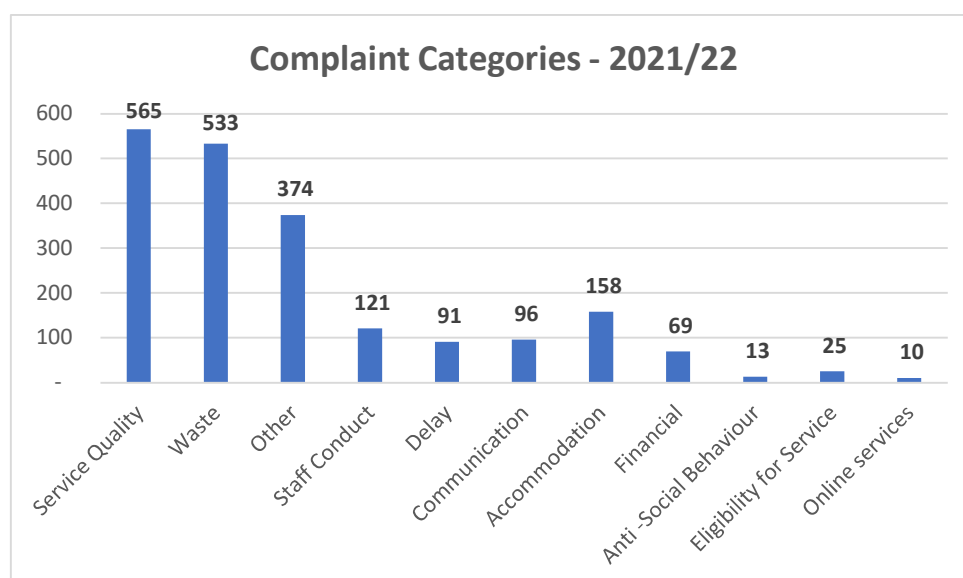
77% of complaints were responded to on time which is below the performance target (95%) and remains the same as the previous year.

The below graph provides further analysis regarding the extent of late responses.



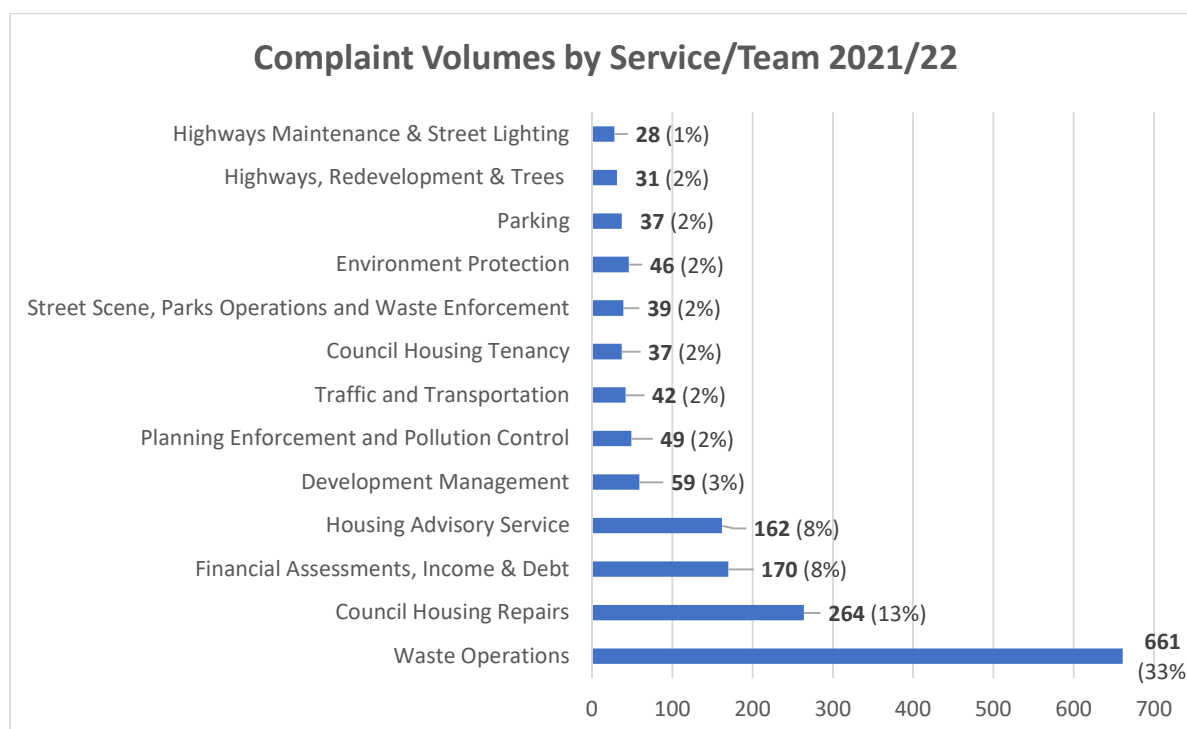
Overall, responses were mostly either 1-5 days late (8%) or over 21 days late (8%). Those taking longer were more complex cases such as homelessness, planning, anti-social behaviour and staff conduct.

3.3 Complaint Themes



The highest numbers of complaints related to service quality (27%) and waste (26%).

The below graph provides a service specific breakdown of complaints.



There are four high volume complaint service areas: Waste Operations, Council Housing Repairs, Financial Assessments Income & Debt and Housing Advisory Service. These four service areas receive high contact as well as complaint volumes compared to other service areas.

During 21/22:

- Waste Operations complaints related to repeatedly missed bins (residential), issues with green waste subscriptions, residential bin damage and delays in replacing these and staff conduct;
- Housing Repair complaints related to service quality and repair delays;
- Financial Assessment, Income & Debt complaints related to communication, information transparency, service quality and council tax payments
- Housing Advisory Service complaints related accommodations issues and lack of suitability, staff conduct and communication

These complaint levels are taken very seriously and Section 5 outlines learning and resulting improvement actions which are currently under way and scheduled for implementation during 2022/23.

4. Ombudsman Complaints

4.1 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The following table summarises the data available on Enfield Council's LGSCO complaints received and decided in 21/22 compared to 20/21.

	Received		Decided		Upheld		Compliance	
	20-21	21-22	20-21	21-22	20-21	21-22	20-21	21-22
Enfield	106	137	102	144	17	27 (73%)	100%	100%
London average	87	117	88	118	16	19 (71%)	99%	99.4%
National average	33	44	33	46	6	7.5 (66%)	99.5%	99.7%

4.1.1 Complaints Received

During 2021/22, there was an increase of 29% complaints to the LGSCO compared to the previous year. However, this was consistent with a national average increase of 33%, and 32% London-wide average increase. This is likely at least in part due to

the closing of the Ombudsman's operations for three months in 2020-21, during the first Covid-19 restrictions, causing a backlog of complaints lasting into 2021-22.

Enfield Council receives a high rate of absolute LGSCO enquiries compared to both national and London averages. However, adjusted for population, Enfield Council receives less per capita than some other London boroughs: Enfield is the fifth most populous London borough but received the 10th most Ombudsman complaints.

The number of complaints referred to Enfield Council for officer input was 72. Comparative data to previous years and other boroughs is unfortunately not available for this metric.

Of the 72 complaints referred to Enfield for action, the Ombudsman elected to further investigate 37 (the remaining the Ombudsman decided not to investigate). Out of these, the Ombudsman upheld 27 complaints (73%). The previous year, 85% were upheld, indicating quality improvement regarding the Council's internal response and investigations outcomes.

The table below identifies complaints received by directorate, as per the Ombudsman's classifications.

Directorate	Area	Complaints		Percentage	
		20-21	21-22	20-21	21-22
Chief Executive	Corporate Services	7	9	6.6%	6.6%
People	Adult Care Services	11	17	18.9%	22.6%
	Education & Children's Services	9	14		
Place	Highways & Transport	14	19	59.4%	62.0%
	Environmental Services	13	24		
	Housing*	27	29		
	Planning & Development	9	13		
Resources	Benefits & Tax	10	12	9.4%	8.6%
Unknown – listed null or other		6	0	5.7%	0%
TOTAL		106	137	100%	100%

**Relates to Temporary Accommodation, Housing Allocations and Private Sector Housing. Tenancy related complaints are addressed by the Housing Ombudsman Service.*

This mix by directorate has remained consistent in the current year, with the percentage divide remaining similar to the previous year. Within the Place department, Environmental Health complaints have increased, while Housing remained relatively static.

4.1.2 Complaints Decided and Upheld

The following complaints were decided by the LGSCO within 2021-22 compared to the previous year:

Decision	Number		Percentage	
	2020-21	2021-22	2020-21	2021-22
Advice Given	9	7	8.9%	4.9%
Closed following preliminary enquiries	35	40	34.3%	27.7%
Incomplete/Invalid	7	4	6.9%	2.8%
Referred back to LBE (premature complaint to Ombudsman)	31	56	30.4%	38.9%
Not Upheld	3	10	2.9%	6.9%
Upheld	17	27	16.7%	18.8%
TOTAL	102	144	100%	100%

LGSCO decided on 41% more complaints compared to 2020-21. Again, this was consistent with a national average increase of 39%, although higher than the London average increase of 34%. Similar to complaints received increase, the decision increase is likely due to the closing of the Ombudsman's operations for three months in 2020-21, during the first Covid-19 restrictions. Consequently, a number of complaints received in 2020-21 will not have been decided upon until 2021-22.

The rate of complaints decided per capita is consistent with Enfield's population, having the sixth highest number of complaints decided amongst London boroughs. This was similar for the complaints upheld, with Enfield Council having the fifth highest absolute number of complaints upheld.

Of complaints closed before investigation, 16 were closed due to insufficient evidence of any fault by Enfield Council.

This table further identifies that the largest single reason for refusal was complaints referred back to Enfield Council as premature, i.e. the Council's internal complaints process had not been completed, representing almost a third of complaints decided.

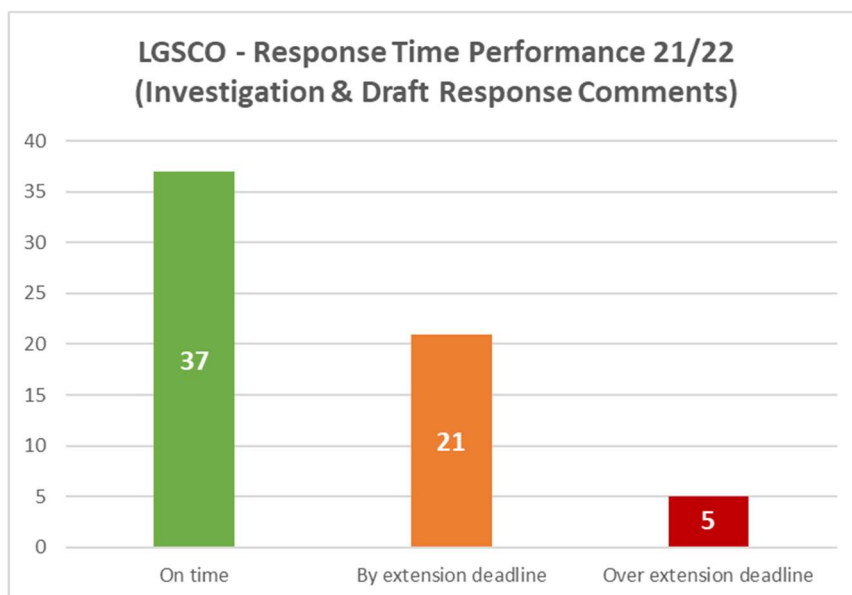
This is a continuing feature from previous years. In particular, a number of complaints were referred back due to the complainant approaching the Ombudsman after completing the First Stage of the Council's process. The Complaints Service is working on processes and consistency of template usage across the organisation to limit this occurring in the future.

The Ombudsman records 27 complaints as upheld, with 10 not upheld. This gives an upheld percentage of 73%, slightly above the London average of 71%. However, this is an improvement from Enfield Council's previous year's percentage of 85%.

The LGSCO reports that satisfactory remedy has now been made in all 23 cases where actions were required by 31st March 2022.

4.1.3 Response Time Performance

In terms of response time performance, although very few responses were late, there were a number of deadline extensions agreed with the Ombudsman indicating complexity of cases.



In the LGSCO's annual performance letter (issued 20th July 2022), it noted 100% satisfaction that Enfield Council had satisfactorily implemented the Ombudsman's recommendations. However, LGSCO advised that there were delays in obtaining information from the Council regarding enquiries and implementing recommendations. Further information was requested to refine learning and improvements, however this was not available.

The investigations highlighted three main areas for improvement:

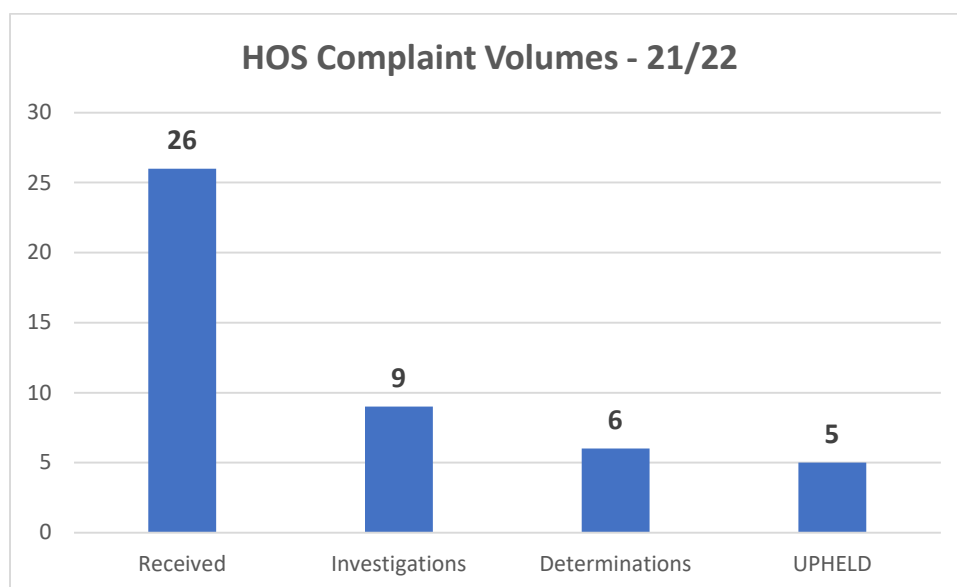
- Delays in provision or assessment of services
- Issues with record keeping and documenting decisions
- LGSCO disagreed with some discretionary policies where they are of the opinion that optional elements should be included

To improve response times and address the performance issues raised by the LGSCO, the following improvements are underway:

- Fortnightly open case reports increased to weekly;
- Additional resilience in the central Complaints Service to chase and collate responses

4.2 Housing Ombudsman

During 21/22, complainants escalated 26 complaints to the Housing Ombudsman (HO).



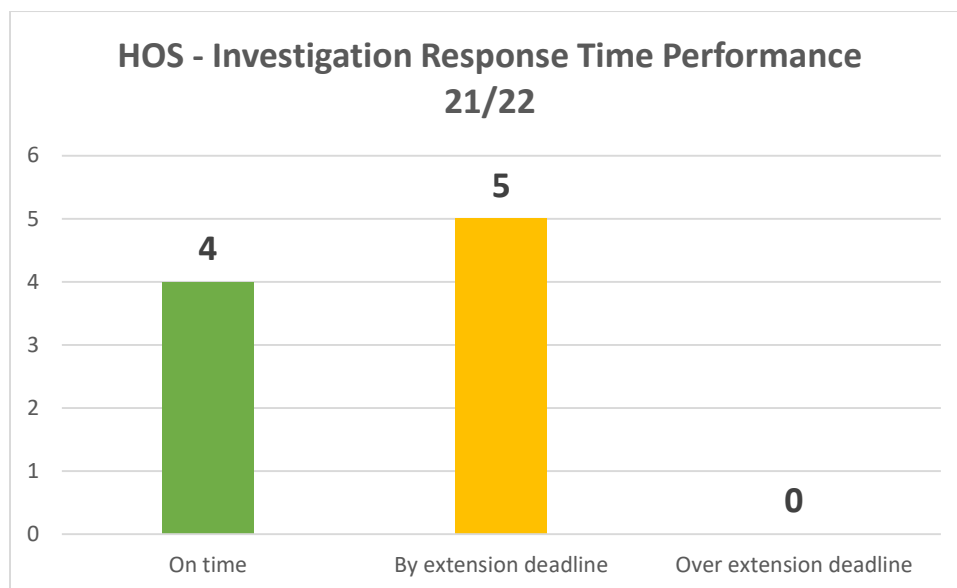
Of the 26 complaints received by the Ombudsman, they chose to investigate 9 of these which resulted in 6 determinations. In total 5 of these were upheld by the Ombudsman.

The reasons for upholding these complaints were as follows:

- In one case, failing to follow correct ASB processes
- In the remaining 4 cases, substantial delays to the implementation of repairs

Consequently, the following improvements are underway:

- ASB procedures were reviewed and updated, and distributed to staff. The specific case concerned was reviewed and completed in the correct way.
- Improved processes to manage complaints, track repair progress and sharing learning



In terms of response time performance, 4 were responded to within the HO's original timeframe requests. 5 were responded to within HO agreed extensions. There were no late responses.

The investigations highlighted two main areas of complaints:

- Council Housing 'Major Repairs' delays
- Anti Social Behaviour and documenting decision-making process

5. Learning from Complaints & Improvement Actions

This next section combines learning from Corporate and Ombudsman complaints shaping future service provision. Focusing on the four highest complaint volume service areas, it details further context and ongoing improvement actions. It concludes with improvements designed to improve corporate response time performance.

5.1 Council Housing Repairs Service

During the Covid-19 pandemic and national lockdowns, the Service carried out emergency repairs only in line with government guidelines. Booking new routine appointments recommenced in April 2021, however there was a high number of routine repairs to be carried out which resulted in a repairs back log.

Although the routine repairs response time was extended to 90 working days, delays in completing repairs continued. Firstly, there were delays in recruiting permanent staff. Secondly, specialist sub-contractors experienced delays resulting from labour and material shortages as a result of the pandemic.

Improvement Actions

- New Customer Support Team now in place who have completed full induction and training.
- Implemented a new process for managing complaints which includes calling the customer when the complaint is received to understand the resolution; full background checks to understand the history of the complaint and the whole issue (to ensure holistic approach across multiple teams when resolving the issue); and weekly meetings with relevant Team Managers to discuss complex complaints and agree next steps.
- Tracking follow on actions and progress to ensure that the repair is completed and identified learning is shared with the team.
- All the Housing Resolution Team have completed external HQN (Housing Quality Network) training to improve repairs diagnosis process thereby increasing the first time fix rate and reduce delays.
- Repairs Operations Team are carrying out post inspections to check the quality of the works and address issues thereby improving repair quality

5.2 Housing Advisory Service

In 21/22 the Council received a significant rise in homelessness applications compared to the previous year (4,013 in 21/22 compared to 2,273 in 20/21). This was due to the unprecedented increase in demand driven by the Covid-19 pandemic and notably the impact of evictions ban and introduction of Domestic Abuse legislation.

The highest volume of complaints received by the Housing Advisory Service relate to the suitability of temporary accommodation and the quality of provision that has been provided. This results from procurement challenges due to shortages of supply and quality issues available to London Borough of Enfield.

Improvement Actions:

- To address accommodation suitability issues, Temporary Accommodation standards are undergoing improvement through the service's Inspection Regime.
- In addressing complaints relating to staff conduct and communication a Quality Management Team has been created and recruited to. The team is responsible for delivering customer service training including the new corporate Mary Gobar training programme. The team will review repeated episodes of such complaints and ensure that these are escalated quickly to senior management for further investigation and performance management.

5.3 Waste Operations

This has been a challenging year for frontline services and there has been higher than usual numbers of agency staff used. Covid-19 has resulted in resident

behaviour change increasing demand across the service areas, as well as requiring increased operational resilience to maintain service delivery. Consequently, there has been an increase in agency staff deployment during this period whilst the extent of behaviour and demand change permanency is assessed.

Improvement Actions:

- Reviewed service areas and rationalised service provision. In line with these findings, recruitment is currently underway to reduce dependency on agency staff which will support improved service delivery
- Missed Bin transformation project is underway throughout 22/23 to understand poor performance root causes and design solutions which will improve the customer experience and significantly reduce failure demand

5.4 Financial Assessments and Income & Debt Service

Last year the service administered a large number of covid related grants schemes for businesses and individual households. As a result, the website required a higher frequency of updates and further clarity on the support available to residents and businesses. This impacted communication and transparency to residents reflected in the complaints received.

Regarding council tax payment complaints, a greater understanding is essential for residents and businesses regarding the processes we have to follow to recover arrears and the legislation to support this. More flexibility is required regarding payment dates for businesses via Direct Debt.

Lastly, 2021-22 was particularly challenging which impacted service quality. The Government offered grants to support during the Covid-19 pandemic and grants were delivered by the team during this year in addition to the normal service delivery and with staff intermittently falling ill with the virus. Although the Service tried to adapt processes and bring in more staff, recruitment and training takes time. Some complaints were therefore due to customers needing to chase and having to wait too long for a response. More staff have been recruited with new and existing staff extensively trained in new procedures designed to increase agility when responding to changes. Enforcement agents work on the Service's behalf advising of any issues raised at the doorstep. Regarding Benefits, some complaints are due to resident dissatisfaction with the decision or the criteria applied. This may result in a reassessment or further explanation about the assessment criteria or advice about discretionary support that the resident can access even if they do not meet the criteria of the benefit they had applied for.

Improvement Actions:

- Communication & transparency: website updates have increased in frequency and new initiatives are being updated in a timely manner. The service has learned to ensure the information on new schemes such as the Council Tax

Rebate is on various social media platforms, website etc. A review of correspondence is underway with the focus on clearer messages and details of the processes in practice (which are also published on the website to improve transparency).

- Council tax payments: The Service is working with residents to assist with longer payment arrangements and support with multiple debts. A review of communications to residents is planned for 22/23. Comprehensive training provided for new Council Tax officers is underway. A review of systems technology (CIVICA On Demand) supporting the service is also required.
- Service Quality: Staff recruitment is ongoing although remains a challenge due to market forces and therefore supported by external CIVICA on Demand resource. An additional 2 Enforcement companies have been appointed which will improve competition and performance enhancement. A self-service portal for benefits, Council Tax and NNDR is planned for implementation during 22/23 ensuring customers have more ownership of their accounts. The system will allow residents and businesses to self-serve with post and correspondence numbers enabling faster turnaround times. A new IT system to improve the workflow for concessionary travel is also requested designed to increase the response rate.

5.6 Response Timescale Performance

In addition to specific service complaints, timeliness response performance across the organisation requires further improvement. Manual processes and central resource challenges resulted in initial processing backlogs which contributed towards timescale performance issues.

Improvement Actions:

The following actions will be implemented during 2022/23

- New case management IT system to automate manual processes, improve data and performance insight
- Implementation of new resource structures and processes to increase performance and increase targeted improvements at service levels

6. Compliments

In 21/22, the Council logged 287 compliments centrally, an increase of 145 compared to the previous year. 55% complimented a staff member with the remaining primarily relating to a service received.

Some of these compliments are provided below.

Place Department

"I would like to say thank you and compliment XX, Waste and Recycling Office. I would like to express that X takes pride in their work and will always come back to me to ensure that the issue is resolved. It is really admirable and refreshing."

"I've been using Barrowell Green Recycling centre for a number of years, and the attitude and service from the team that works there is second to none. They are always helpful, cheerful and polite. The whole team deserve a lot of credit. Even when it's cold and raining, they stay positive and are very helpful."

"Thank you for always smiling and waving back to our children who absolutely love watching you collect the recycling bins."

"I would like to compliment the street cleaners who were working on X Road. The work they carried out was fabulous. The pavement and road, particularly outside my flat are absolutely so clean"

"I would like to give a huge thank you, and well done to your refuse collectors. I left my blue bin out in front of my property, instead of the black. (I had been away for 5 week so I was out of sync). The operators went the extra distance and collected the black bin from the house. I was thrilled. If they had not I would have considered it my fault, not theirs. So thank you again for going that extra mile."

"We are very pleased with how the trees and bushes - and dead leaves - have been trimmed, collected and generally kept in order where we live over recent months. This was a tremendous effort. Thank you".

Chief Executive's Department

"My child got married on X and I got delayed in terrible traffic...The Registrar was amazinghe allowed me to park in the car park and calmed me down"

"Just had the absolute pleasure of speaking with a lady who booked our wedding notice. Absolutely wonderful customer experience"

People Department

"I am moving out of Enfield and I wanted to say how fantastically helpful, friendly and supportive the Enfield SEN team had been"

"Thank you for your visit and positive, understand and sensitive approach to my mother. She smiled at you at the end and it was meant. She appreciated how you handled. Thank you for the invaluable information and links. This makes things a lot easier to research and manage. Carry on doing the amazing job you are doing."

"Thank you so much for all your help, support & information. You have been amazingly prompt in everything and we as a family are so very grateful to you. I can't begin to tell you the amount of stress it relieves from our end"

"Thank you so much for arranging the rail fittings in my daughter's house so quickly. It is really appreciated. It was lovely to meet you and we are really grateful for your care."

"My Aunt who passed away recently spent her last days at home with family and friends around her and I wanted to pass on my thanks for the support that Enfield Council arranged for her. Without this support, we could not have carried on with the live-in carer and her life would have been much harder in the last few months. Thank you so much for your care and compassion and for helping us to continue with the support she needed."

Resources Department

"I spoke to X from customer services. She was very helpful and very kind and an asset to the council. Thank you very much."

"X was very helpful ..very efficient ..as I was stressed as I was having difficulties to send my documents via email but X was very patient to help me to send all documents requested. Thank you very much again for all your great support."

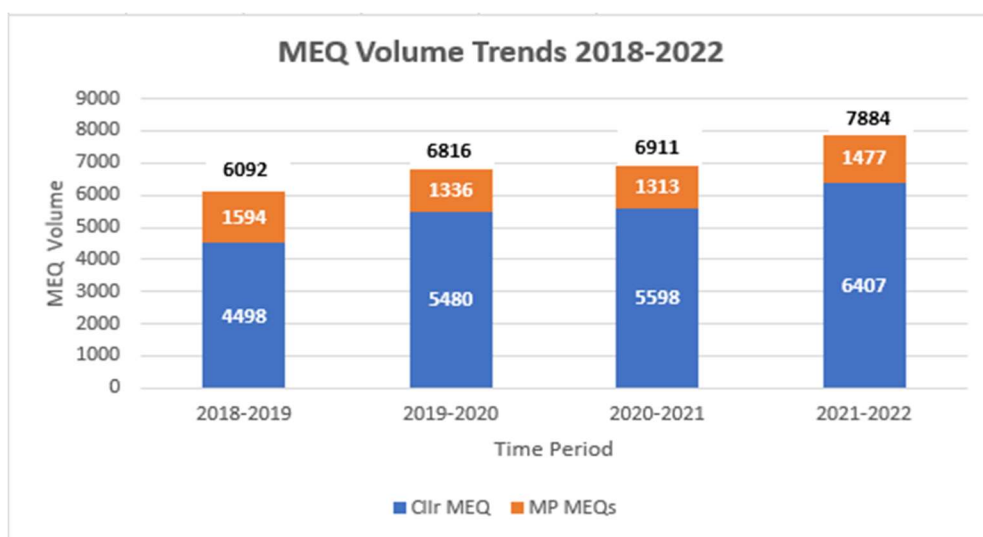
"I took my 3 children to Palmers Green library today and was absolutely delighted with the service from the staff there. My children are taking part in the summer reading challenge and one member of staff came and spoke to the children at length about what they had read- the kids were so excited and enthused by this. The other staff member helped me with my (numerous) membership enquiries and was so kind, patient and helpful. Please pass on my thanks and compliments for their outstanding service."

7. Member Enquiries (MEQs)

This section provides performance and data insight into Member Enquiries (MEQs) submitted by the Council's Members and MPs during 2021/22.

7.1 MEQ Volume

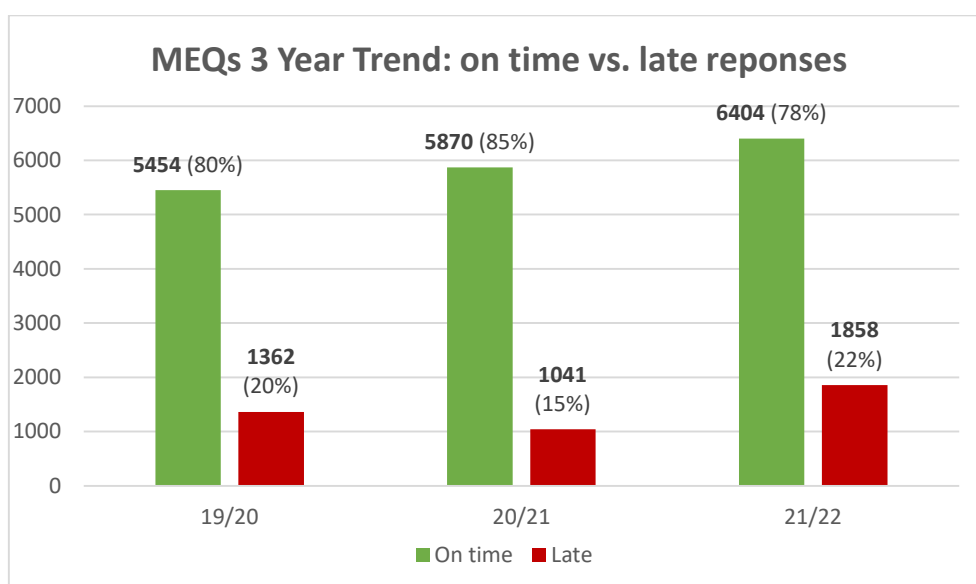
London Borough of Enfield's local elections took place in May 2022. Therefore, the below yearly trend analysis reflects on the previous 4-year political cycle. During this time the volume of MEQs received has increased year-on-year.



During 21/22, the highest volume of MEQs was received over the 4 year period totalling 7,884 (6407 Member and 1,477 MP MEQs).

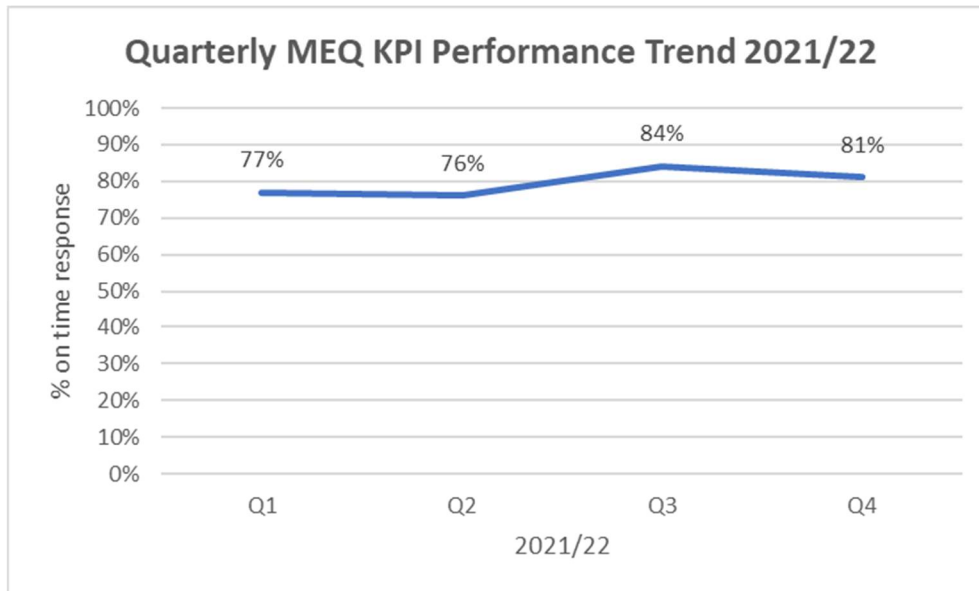
7.2 Response Timescale Performance

The Council aims to respond to 95% of MEQs within 8 working days.



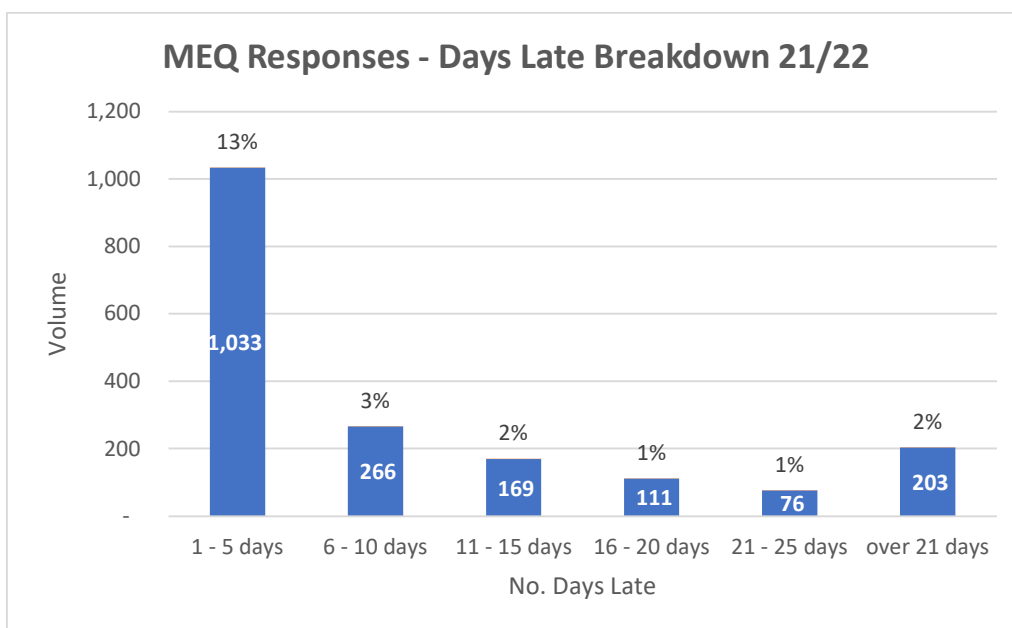
Compared to the previous two years, 21/22 MEQ response time performance has decreased.

However, there have been in-year improvements when comparing Q1 to Q4 performance as per the graph below.



During 21/22 there were delays when initially processing MEQs due to lack of automation, staff sickness (long absence) levels. The manual process led to initial bottlenecks during Q1 & Q2 which were subsequently alleviated in Q3 & Q4. The introduction of a new MEQ case management system, resource structure and handling policy during 2022/23 are designed to improve response performance and quality. These will also increase reporting quality and data insight to enhance a targeted approach when improving service delivery.

The below graph provides further analysis regarding the extent of late responses.



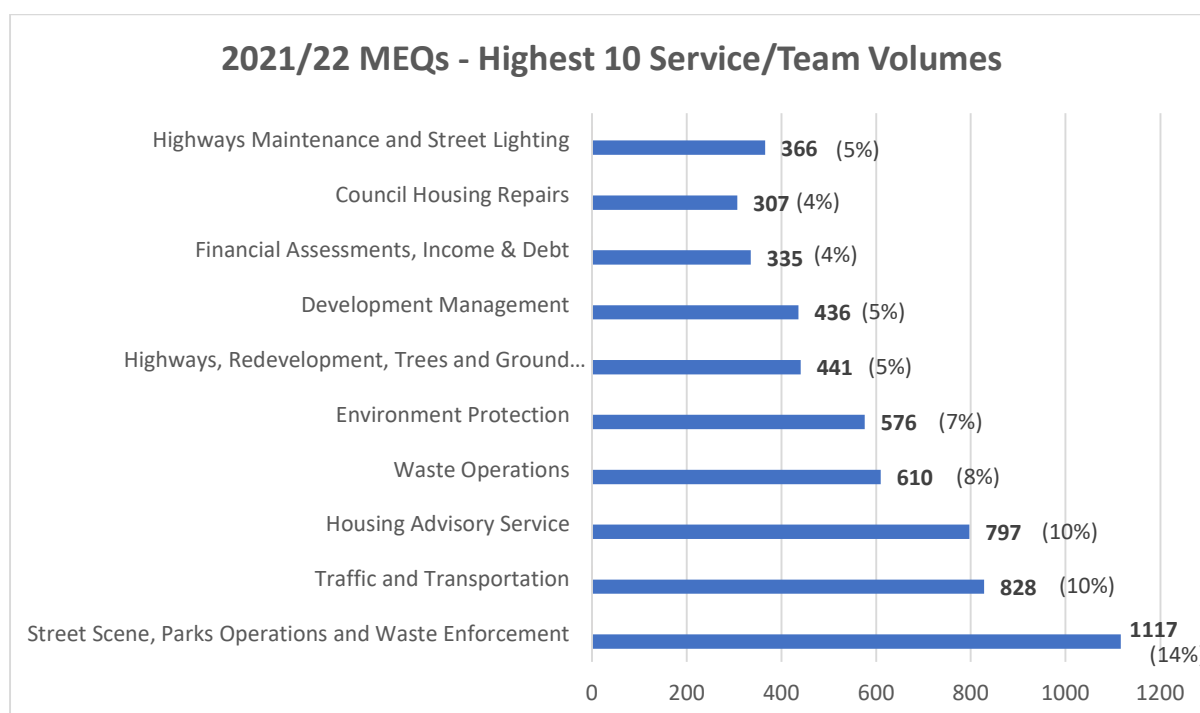
The majority were 1-5 days late. For those over 21 days late, there were a range of service areas including:

- Housing (unsuitable accommodation, eviction/homelessness, housing allocation and council housing tenancy)
- Development Management (planning applications and enforcement and applications)
- Anti-social behaviour
- Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs)
- Property management
- Missed bin collections
- Fly-tipping
- Green space maintenance

Some MEQs related to complex cases, in particular Housing related enquiries and therefore additional time was required to provide complete responses.

7.3 Enquiry Themes

The below graph lists the 10 highest service/team areas regarding MEQ volumes during 21/22.



A further topic breakdown of the top 5 areas is as follows:

- **Street Scene, Parks Operations & Waste Enforcement:** litter bins/overflowing bins, fly tipping, graffiti, green space maintenance
- **Traffic & Transportation:** LTNs, traffic calming measures, Controlled Parking Zones

- **Housing Advisory Service (homelessness prevention advice & relief):** residents requiring housing assessments, evictions, unsuitable accommodation, accommodation repairs/condition issues
- **Waste Operations:** missed bin collections, damaged bins, replacement bin delays, green waste subscription issues
- **Environment Protection:** fly tipping & enforcement, abandoned vehicles, Fixed Penalty Notices, pest infestations, overgrown gardens, noise issues

8. Conclusion

2021/22 saw the largest volume of Complaints and MEQs compared to the last three years and challenges regarding response performance. However, there were reductions in the number of complaints escalated from first to final stage. The Ombudsman also upheld fewer complaints compared to the previous year.

From a customer perspective there were high complaint volumes regarding waste management, housing, homelessness and financial support. Member Enquiries demonstrated significant focus on fly-tipping, resident missed bin collections as well as maintaining public spaces, preventing homelessness and traffic calming measures.

In addition to redesigning corporate resource structures, processes and systems to improve response time and quality, a number of actions plans are underway at an individual service level, informed by complaints learning throughout the year. These include enhanced staff training and induction programmes, service redesigns, recruitment drives and improved customer communication processes to improve service delivery and reduce the initial complaints received.