

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
Bristol City Council Self-Assessment



Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code				
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Comments
	<p>Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</p> <p><i>An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.</i></p>		<p>✓ BCC Complaints Policy Chapter 3</p>	<p>Our definition of a complaint is: <i>A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual citizen about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a Council service.</i></p> <p>We believe our definition is robust and meets the requirements of both the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's guidance : <i>"A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response."</i></p> <p>Whilst our definition does not explicitly reference a group of residents, we would not refuse a complaint for this reason.</p>
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	✓ BCC Complaints Policy Chapter 6		
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p>	✓ BCC Complaints Policy Chapter 6		<p>We consider every complaint on its individual merits. Decisions to exclude complaints from the process are made by our Customer Relations Team in consultation with relevant senior managers and legal services where appropriate. Complaints will not be considered, or considered further, if the complaint is not about the actions or decisions of the Council, or any organisation acting on its behalf or if the same complaint has been responded to through the complaints</p>

				<p>procedure or by the Local Government Ombudsman, Housing Ombudsman or the Information Commissioner.</p> <p>We exclude on specified grounds relating to; time limits, access to information, illegal activity, court proceedings, negligence claims, right of appeal, complaints against elected members or the elected Mayor, policy decisions, complaints about schools, complaints from professionals or external contractors, complaints from staff, unreasonable complainant behaviour, and statutory complaints about adult services. See Chapter 6 of our complaints policy for full details.</p>
2	Accessibility			
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	✓ BCC Complaints & Feedback		<p>Complaints can be submitted via our webpage, by post, or in person at our Citizen Service Point</p> <p>We do not advertise routes to complain by email because they often do not contain the level of detail our Customer Services team require, so we will always encourage anyone that can use our web form to use it. However, we do not turn away complaints made by email – those received this way will be added into the system manually by one of our Customer Relations Officers.</p>
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	✓ BCC Complaints Policy		
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	✓ BCC Equality and Inclusion Policy and Strategy 2018-2023		
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?		✓	<p>Currently we have our complaints policy published online for residents and any member of the public to access.</p> <p>For those residents who do not access the internet our frontline staff will advise enquirers about our complaints process and the Housing Ombudsman as required.</p>

				<p>We recognise that moving forward we need to be more proactive to adhere to the Complaint Handling Code and are preparing to advise residents about our complaints process in regular newsletters and our annual report to residents.</p> <p>We have also recommended exploring the feasibility of the details being incorporated onto other correspondence, such as rent statements and new tenant starter packs.</p>
3	Complaints team and process			
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	✓		
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	✓		
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	✓		
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	N/A		We have a two stage complaints procedure that meets the timescales and requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's new Code.
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		✓	
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	✓		Our customer relations team inform complainants about the Housing Ombudsman if their complaint reaches our final stage and falls within the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman.
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including	✓		

	correspondence from the resident?			
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			Stage 1
4	Communication			
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	✓		
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	✓		
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	✓		The current process is that the central Customer Relations Team assess and assign all complaints within 24 hours of receipt to the relevant service, based on the content sent in. If cases are assigned incorrectly, the process takes account of this and allows for service-based receiving officers to reject cases back to the CRT for re-assignment.
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	✓		
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			95.9% This figure refers to our Housing & Landlord Services department, not all complaints about Bristol City Council. The remaining 0.1% of complaints that aren't resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2 are escalated to the Housing Ombudsman. See Appendix 1 for analysis
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			4.0% This figure refers to our Housing & Landlord Services department, not all complaints about Bristol City Council. The remaining 0.1% of complaints that aren't resolved at stage 1 or stage 2 are escalated to the Housing Ombudsman.

				See Appendix 1 for analysis
	<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one Stage one (with extension) • Stage two Stage two (with extension) 			<p>Stage 1 = 63%</p> <p>Stage 1 with extensions = N/A</p> <p>Stage 2 = 67%</p> <p>Stage 2 with extensions = N/A</p> <p>We are exploring options within our Complaints system in order to reliably identify cases where targets have been extended in order to improve this data in future self-assessments.</p>
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	✓		
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	✓		
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction	N/A		<p>Our Stages 1 and 2 responses incorporate a feedback rating measure, however historically the response rate of complainants has been low and as a result we do not currently analyse the data.</p> <p>In light of the Housing Ombudsman's new Code and the publication of the Social Housing White Paper we have made a recommendation to investigate ways to improve the response rate of this survey.</p>
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service			
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	✓		
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	✓		

6	Fairness in complaint handling			
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	✓		
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	✓		
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			Less than 10%. We refused for a variety of reasons, but these decisions are taken on a case-by-case basis. Usually, the reason is an unanswered question at Stage One, which is then passed back to the officer who dealt with it.
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	✓		
7	Outcomes and remedies			
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	✓		
8	Continuous learning and improvement			
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?			<p><i>Customer Relations</i> Improvements and learning points are taken on a case-by-case basis. We report monthly to senior managers about trends and work is active to ensure that remedies and learning improvements are implemented.</p> <p><i>Planned Maintenance</i> We received complaints around using new 'Air Source Heat Pumps' at a sheltered housing scheme – we commissioned an independent study and as a result have improved the systems, and better understand the</p>

				<p>impact of installing these – which will help our forward planning for carbon zero retrofit projects.</p> <p>We also changed our kitchen install specification on feedback and complaints from residents so that the time taken to install is less.</p> <p><i>Response Repairs & Relets</i> Each year we produce a self-assessment evidence pack, however new priorities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have forced us to postpone this for the year 2019-2020. In 2018-2019 we implemented two service improvements using this evidence, see 'complaints' section of Appendix 2</p>
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents?</p> <p>b) the board/governing body?</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?</p>			<p>a) We share a performance overview with our Service User Group (SUG) members for our Response Repairs and Relets, see Appendix 2. We also include number of complaints received each month in the Quarterly SUG.</p> <p>Our Planned Maintenance team also provide SUGs with details of; satisfaction survey results, complaints performance, and improvements we make. A member of the SUG is also on the core group managing kitchen install contract.- this is part of a self-assessment process with SUG's each year</p> <p>We publish data and our priorities for improvement identified from our Resident Satisfaction Survey, and our performance in council housing on our website.</p> <p>b) Our Customer Relations team share monthly statistics on complaint handling with our directors and senior management.</p> <p>c) Our Annual Report to residents has not usually included data or improvements specifically on complaint handling in housing.</p>

				<p>It does include a section on understanding and responding to your needs and we also publish data and our priorities for improvement from our Resident Satisfaction Survey</p> <p>For example, for the year 2019-2020 our survey identified six key resident priorities, which we are working to implement through our Moving Forward Together programme.</p> <p>We're also using research into the housing needs of older and disabled people, and BAME communities in Bristol to ensure that equality and diversity are central to how we deliver services.</p>
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	✓		
	What changes have we made?			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are in the process of changing the description of the Housing Ombudsman in our complaints policy. • We are amending our final stage response letter to explicitly signpost the complainant to the Housing Ombudsman if they are not satisfied with the outcome. • We are preparing a series of internal training webinars to ensure frontline staff are aware of the new Code and its implications. <p>We have also identified actions to take to further align ourselves with the new Complaint Handling Code and the Social Housing White Paper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new role is being created within our Housing & Landlord Services who will have access and capacity to analyse 12 months of complaints data. • Our Annual Report to residents, published in October, will include complaint handling data and the details of any improvements we have made as a result of continuous learning from complaints.

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Housing Management board meetings (quarterly) will include briefings on complaints data and the details of any improvements we have made as a result of continuous learning from complaints. • We will communicate the details of any improvements we have made as a result of continuous learning from complaints using our webpage and annual report to tenants. Any high profile or substantial changes will be broadcasted using our housing newsletter and social media.
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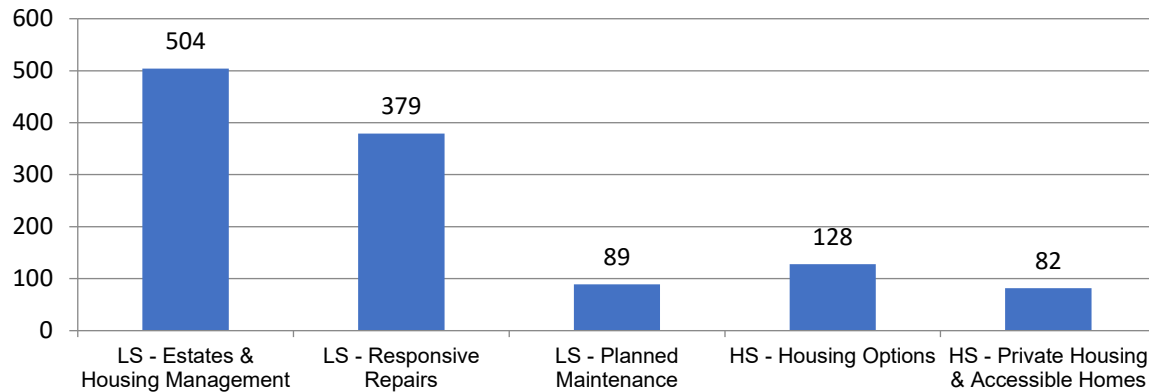
Appendix 1

Housing & Landlord Services – Complaints Data

To accompany the Self-Assessment form completed in compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Code, this Appendix provides data and context around some of the answers given in that form. The data has been collated for the period 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020 and compares Landlord Services (LS) teams, Housing Services (HS) teams and the Council as a whole. Only data relating to LS teams has been considered when completing the Self-Assessment form.

1. **Total complaints**

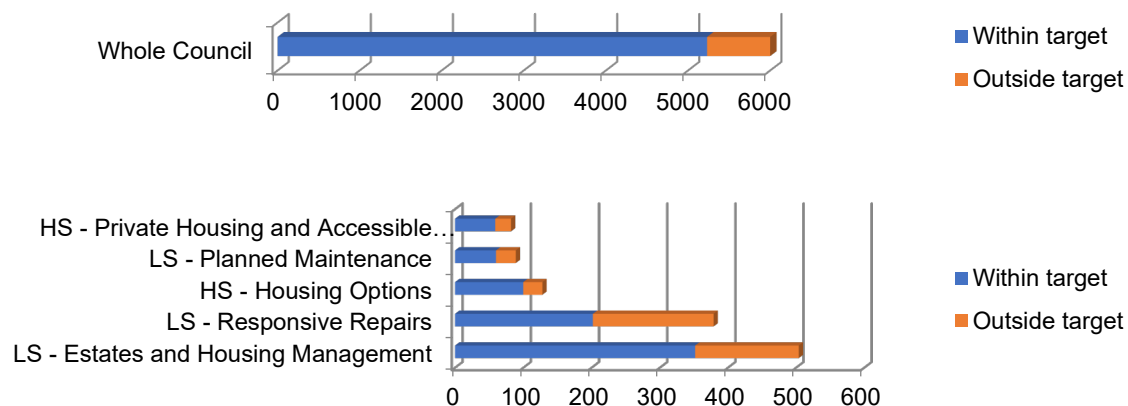
The total number of non-statutory complaints received by the Council was 6,437. Of those, 972 (15%) related to LS teams and 210 (3%) to HS teams, broken down as follows:



2.

Response targets

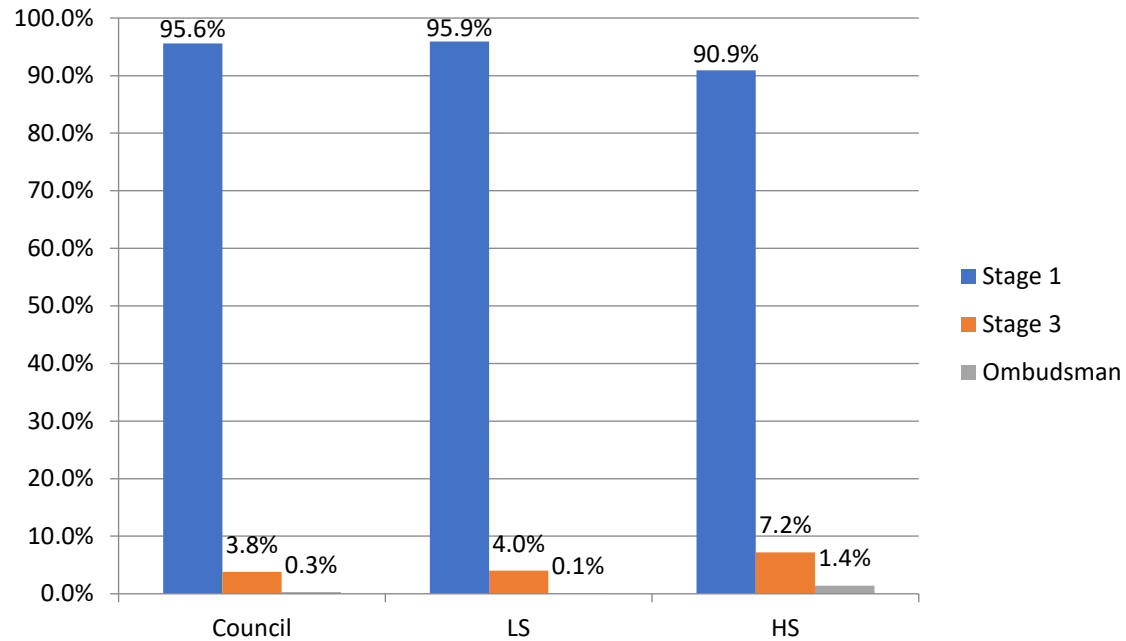
LS responded to 63% of complaints within target, with HS responding to 75% within target. Both of these are lower than the overall performance of the Council, which stands at 81%.



	Within target	Outside target	Total	% within target
Council	5232	1205	6437	81%
LS - Estates and Housing Management	352	152	504	70%
LS - Responsive Repairs	202	177	379	53%
LS - Planned Maintenance	60	29	89	67%
Landlord Services totals	614	358	972	63%
HS - Housing Options	100	28	128	78%
HS - Private Housing and Accessible Homes	59	23	82	72%
Housing Services totals	159	51	210	75%

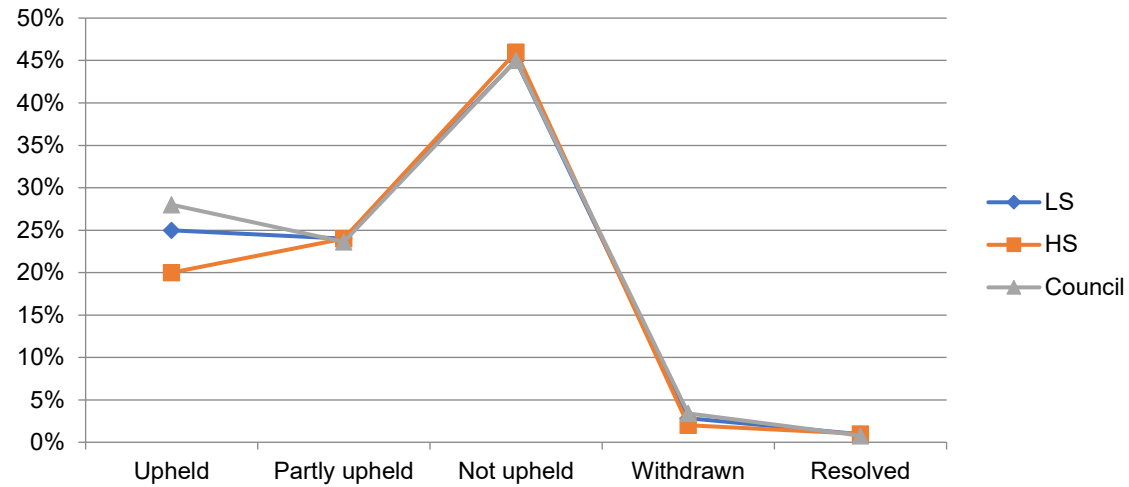
3. **Resolution stage**

The stages at which non-statutory complaints are resolved are very similar in LS compared to the Council as a whole, with around 95% of complaints being resolved at stage 1, less than 5% at stage 2 and less than 1% being escalated to the Ombudsman. HS show a slightly different picture with just over 90% resolution at stage 1, 7% at stage 2 and 1.4% being referred to the Ombudsman.



4. Outcomes








In terms of outcomes, we see similar trends with LS and HS as we do across the Council as a whole, with the only noticeable difference being the percentage of complaints that are upheld.




Appendix 2

Response Repairs and Relets Performance Overview 2018-19

Response Repairs and Relets Performance Overview 2018-19

Key Performance Measure	Target 2018/19	Achieved	On target?	Comments
Appointments				
% of appointments kept or early (brought forward to suit the tenant)	90%	88%		Although we missed our target we set this target high as we know that keeping appointments is important to our tenants and a key driver for tenant satisfaction. Most of the appointments not kept were either missed, late, or we were unable to access the property.
Managing the repair				
Repairs completed right (no callback) first time (no follow on or incomplection)	86%	83%		Our aim is to do the right repair, first time, on time. This is convenient for the tenant and efficient for us. We know some of the more complex repairs will need additional visits and inspections.
Average repair timescales (internal workforce)	Less than 8 days	9.5 days		Due to issues with our external repairs contractor our internal workforce have been picking up additional repairs which has impacted upon repair timescales
Satisfaction with the overall quality of the repair	93%	94%		We are proud to have exceeded our target
Number of complaints received	<267	224		We are pleased that we have reduced the number of complaints received
Relets				
Average relet repair timescales	STD 26 days VUN 52 days	STD 26 days VUN 55 days	 	Reducing relet time so we have less void properties and can better meet housing need has been a priority this year and continues to be key priority for 2019/20.

Overall Satisfaction with new home	93%	95%		We are pleased that satisfaction with the quality of new homes remains high, even though we are now reletting homes much more quickly than before.
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Other Achievements

Acquired properties turned around for homeless families	<p>This year we have jointly worked with the Temporary Accommodation Team bringing 19 Acquired properties back into use for homeless families. Any properties being brought back into use increase the property value by being in a good, occupied condition. Properties used for Temporary Accommodation are unsecure tenancies so these properties remain in BCC ownership and they do not have a 'Right to Buy' element.</p> <p>This also delivers significant cost savings to BCC as a whole for avoiding expensive alternative Temporary Accommodation for our homeless families. The cost to bring a property up to Temporary Accommodation letting standard is £7000 per property so £133,000 in total. Rental income from these is £120,000 for 2018-19 so will quickly move into regaining outlay early in the 2nd year of renting. After that, all income is direct income into the General fund.</p>
Civica CX launch and Click upgrade	<p>We launched Civica CX, our new Housing Management system in October 2018. This project has been complex and challenging for us and we have experienced a number of integration issues and identified a number of training needs and process changes, many of which are still being resolved. We also needed to upgrade Click at the same time, to ensure compatibility with Civica CX and ensure we are able to upgrade further later. Despite the issues staff have been dedicated to adapt, change and support the new system and we have been very proud of the effort made.</p>
Improved process for Carpentry repairs	<p>We trialled a system where the Glaziers book the appointment to fit the unit at a later date while they are with the tenant taking measurements. This new process reduces no access, reduces avoidable contact and improves overall tenant satisfaction as they like agreeing the appointment with the Operative there and then. It also reduces complaints as tenants are not waiting to hear from us to make further appointments or having to contact us to chase progress. We are looking to roll out this process to other types of repair in the future.</p>
New technology for Plumbing Team	<p>This year we have further invested in our Aqua Vac Gutter Clear/Cleaning system. This system enables us to carry out gutter clearances and cleans from ground level. The work can be carried out by a single operative and no longer needs to be carried out off a double extension ladder and sometimes scaffold, making it a much safer task to carry out and</p>

	reduces the H & S risk with working at heights. It has had a significant impact on the cost of carrying out the task meaning we have made cost savings in both resources and transport. Sending one vehicle to the property instead of two also reduces our carbon footprint and contributes towards easing traffic congestion.
Improved processes and new van fleet for Gas Team	<p>We have implemented a new process where only two Gas service visits are made with the third being the forced access. We are much more proactive in contacting our Tenants around the first and second visits which lowers instances of no access. The process has been introduced to reduce costs and lessen the impact on the environment through reducing unnecessary travel.</p> <p>A programme has also been introduced to service MVHR (Mechanical, ventilation heat recovery) installations that have been installed in a number of new build properties. A number of our engineers have been trained to carry out this work keeping it in house with Operatives our Tenants can relate to.</p> <p>Our new van fleet is now being rolled out with well-designed vehicles helping to improve the service we provide and again reducing impact on the environment with more modern Engines and Technology.</p>

Budget Spend

Response Budget 2018/19 £10,074,308

Spend Category	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL	% of Spend
Operatives Salaries / Fleet / Materials	£1,013,437	£1,852,648	£1,044,778	£2,412,110	£6,322,973	71.04%
External Contractors	-£161,522	£680,049	£469,173	£1,326,522	£2,314,222	26.00%
Internal Trading (Mainly Joinery Shop)	£27,047	£73,756	£50,489	£130,446	£281,738	3.17%
Other Supplies & Services	£950	£330	£12,727	-£11,690	£2,317	0.03%
Income	£0	£0	-£20,804	-£51	-£20,804	-0.23%
Total	£879,912	£2,606,783	£1,556,363	£3,857,336	£8,900,445	100.00%

Year End
18/19

-£1,173,863

Significant issues with our principle external repairs contractor resulted in the decision to mutually end the contract. As a result, less repairs were delivered than anticipated and we ended the year with an under spend of almost -£1.2m. We have some temporary arrangements in place and have started work on a longer term procurement exercise.

Complaints

Breakdown of complaint area	Total	
Surveying	100	<p>We received 224 complaints in 2018/19, compared to 267 the year before. We are pleased to have reduced the number of complaints received by this amount. We are also monitoring the reasons for complaints, so that we can identify trends and areas we need to focus upon.</p> <p>We also set ourselves a target for 2018/19 to Implement two service improvements or improvement pilots as a result of learning from complaints. We implemented a new process where we would write to neighbouring tenants before we started repair work on a void property to let them know what we were doing and the Void Surveyor's contact details if they needed further information. We also ensure we write to tenants where there is significant repair work happening near to where they live to advise them what will be happening. This pro- active communication has reduced the number of calls we receive from tenants and helps tenants to feel more aware of what is happening in their neighbourhood.</p> <p>Surveying is the largest area for complaints. This is expected as often surveyors are informing tenants that the repair is their own responsibility or dealing with complex ongoing issues. We review all complaints closely and ensure that we share any learning from our complaints with all surveyors during our regular team meetings.</p>
Gas	30	
Plumbing	24	
Carpentry	23	
Policy decision	13	
Electrical	10	
Plastering	7	
Van Driving	6	
Contractor	6	
Customer Service	3	
Relets	1	
General Trades	1	
Total	224	

Values

Dedicated | Respect | Ownership | Curious | Collaborative

Through everything we do, we are united by how we act and what we stand for – our organisational values. These say clearly what matters to us when we're working with each other, our partners, or people who call Bristol home. Every month, we share a sample of feedback we have received from our tenants with staff in our monthly performance report. Here is a small sample of the great feedback we have received.

"Thank you so much it was fantastic, good service and repair. Good people on phone" – **Tenant, BS11**

"Mrs XXXX from 14 XXX has just called to pass on her praise to the plasterer who came out last Thursday. She said that his work was outstanding and second-to-none, and that he was polite, courteous and respectful and took his time making sure everything was as she wanted" - **Tenant, BS10**

"I've reported a few repairs and the young man that came to my house yesterday was truly lovely. Very helpful. Polite and definitely got the job done. It was a plumbing job. This young man got the job sorted and I would like it to be documented that he is definitely great at the job and should be praised for it" – **Tenant, BS13**

"They done a very, very good job. They clear up every bit of mess and washed all the slabs down when they finished. It was brilliant! I had so many cracks on there and the slabs were lifting up. They came lay them dead flat, yes brilliant." – **Tenant, BS4**

"The man is very competent and very friendly. The guy that I saw, he came to my property when I moved in 3 years ago. I recognised him. he did a good job. He was very polite and a very nice man" -**Tenant, BS11**

"They came out as soon as they could. This was a couple of hours after I phoned" – **Tenant, BS13**

Key projects for 2019/20

Reduce void times	Reducing void turnaround times continues to be a top priority for us. Following a successful 'Site supervisor' Pilot scheme in the Southwest patch of the city which seen a reduction of 14 calendar days in overall void turnaround time for voids in that area, we have rolled out a 'Site supervisor' to several of our voids area patches. Site supervisor's co-ordinate the internal workforce across the patch to maximise efficiency and speed up void times.
Improved technology for Surveyors	A variety of tablets are currently being trialled by surveyors for an expected rollout later this year. The aim for this new hardware solution is to increase flexibility and efficiency in their way of working, allowing a faster response to tenants, quicker turn over for voids, as well as reducing the amount of unnecessary travel between sites.
Procurement of new repairs contractor	Significant issues with our principle external repairs contractor resulted in the decision to mutually end the contract early. We have started work on procuring a new repairs contractor and this will be a priority for us in 2019/20.