



ADJUDICATION & REVIEW COMMITTEE 17 OCTOBER 2013

Subject Heading:

HOUSING COMPLAINTS

CMT Lead:

Joy Hollister, Group Director – Children,
Adults and Housing

Report Author and contact details:

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Policy context:

Council housing and tenancy issues

Financial summary:

None directly associated with this report

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Ensuring a clean, safe and green borough	<input type="checkbox"/>
Championing education and learning for all	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing economic, social and cultural activity in thriving towns and villages	<input type="checkbox"/>
Valuing and enhancing the lives of our residents	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delivering high customer satisfaction and a stable council tax	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with the number and outcome of complaints and Member Enquiries for housing services over the recent twelve month period. Since the return of the ALMO (Homes and Housing) to the Council there has been a phased integration of all housing services. However in respect to the logging of complaints and Member Enquiries full integration onto a single system has yet to be completed.
- 1.2 This report integrates information where possible though in some cases the information is not comparable. For this report where the information is

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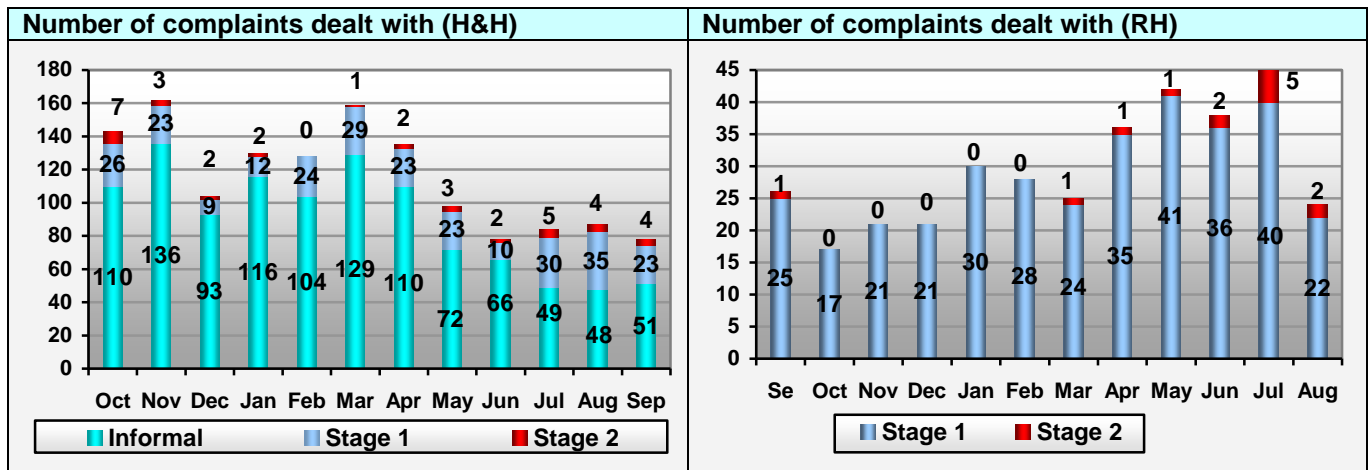
separate data for the former ALMO is identified as **H&H** and for the former Retained Housing as **RH**.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the contents of the report.
- 2.2 To receive a further report concerning the integration of the complaints functions of the different arms of the Housing Service.

REPORT DETAIL

All Complaints

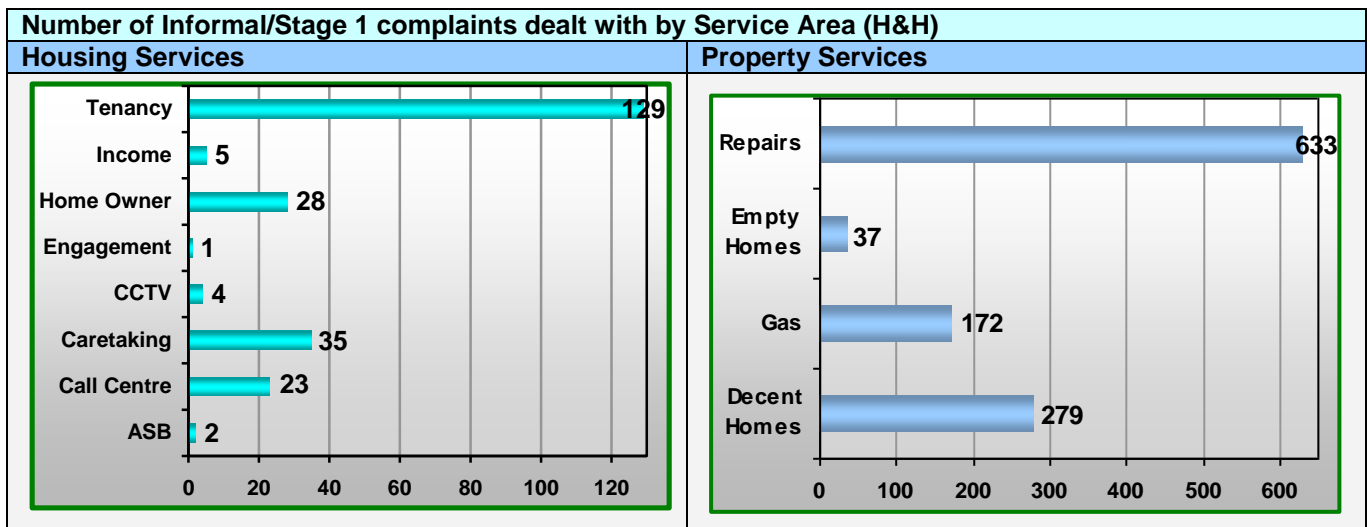


- 3.1. In the last twelve months 1296 complaints have been received by H&H which is a marginal increase on the previous twelve months (1273).
- 3.2. Complaints hit a peak twice during the year. The first peak was during the start of the autumn when complaints about damp and heating start to increase. The second peak is at the end of the financial year (March/April) and may be due to programmes coming to an end or delayed starts.
- 3.3. In the last year H&H had 35 complaints escalating to Stage 2 accounting for less than 3% of all complaints received.
- 3.4. The former Retained Housing (RH) service also receives a significant number of complaints. Over the last year 310 complaints were received at Stage 1. Of these 13 escalated to Stage 2 which equates to 4% of complaints received.
- 3.5. Very few complaints escalate to Stage 2 of the process demonstrating that the procedure for H&H and RH is robust for resolving issues.

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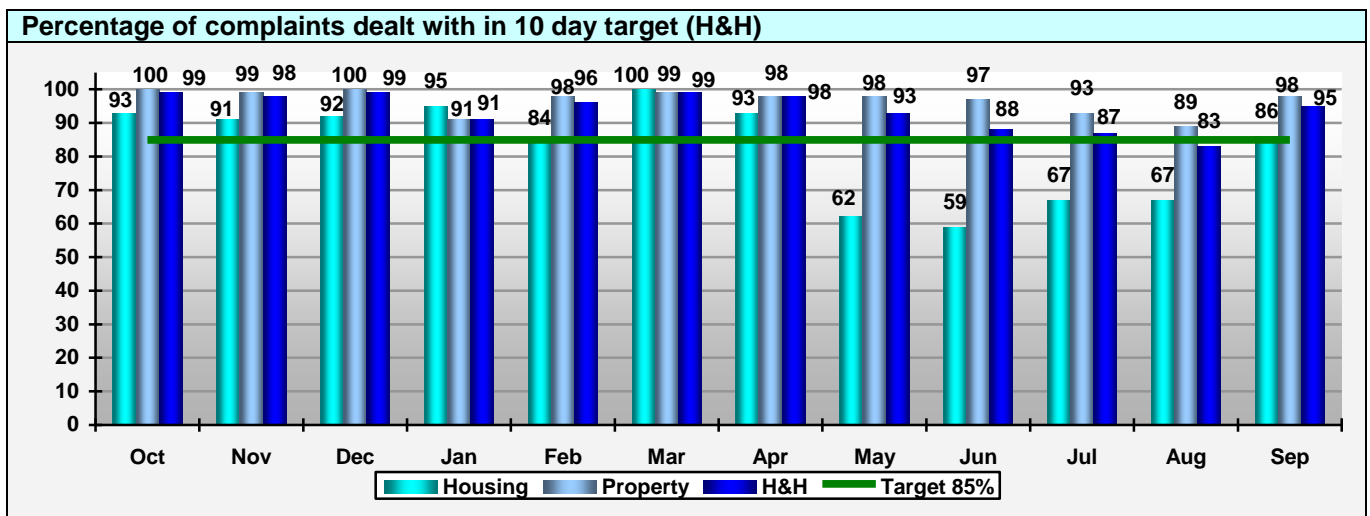
3.6 Across the council a total of 1571 Informal/Stage 1 complaints were received between October 2012 and September 2013.

Homes and Housing Informal/Stage 1 Complaints



4.1 Property Services receive the majority of Informal and Stage 1 complaints, a total of 1121. Of these over half (633) concern repairs. Housing Services received a total of 227 complaints.

Performance H&H



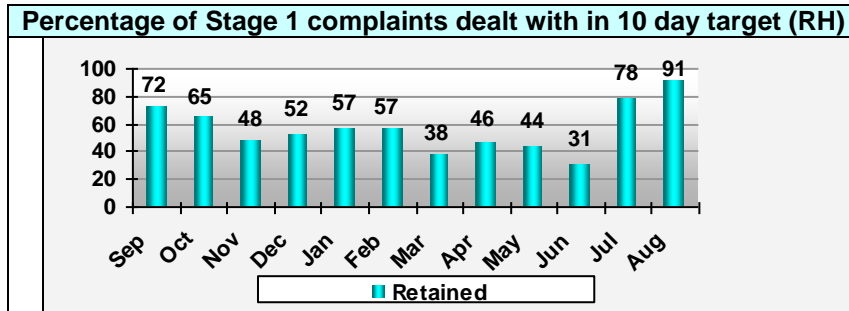
5.1 Entry into the complaints process is either at Informal or at Stage 1. Both are formal stages of the process but where a complaint can be dealt with quickly and more importantly directly with the resident the complaint is logged as Informal.

5.2 The expectation with an Informal complaint is that the resident is contacted within 2 days by telephone and it is explained how the issue is to be resolved and when. The complaint is then monitored to ensure that H&H does what it has promised to do.

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5.3 A response to a complaint is required within 10 days. The corporate target for responses is 85% within 10 days. Homes and Housing failed to achieve this target once during the last year. Although 10 days is the target it is the intention of H&H to turn complaints around in as short a time as possible whilst maintaining a high level of quality. The impact of Informal complaints has led to an average turnaround of 3.4 days.

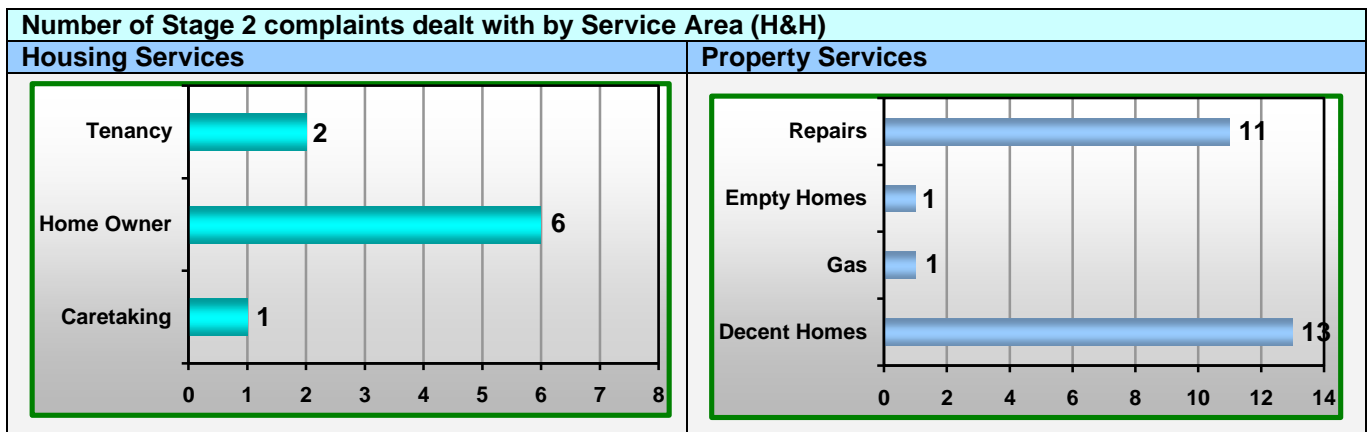
Performance RH



6.1 The RH target for a response to a Stage 1 complaint is also 10 days. Response rates are more volatile than for other Housing services.

6.2 Some of the RH processes have recently been reviewed to improve performance. This has proved to be successful as evidenced in August. However a full review of the service will be carried out as part of the transition plan and long term service improvements implemented accordingly to ensure the level of service achieved in August is maintained.

Stage 2 Complaints H&H & RH

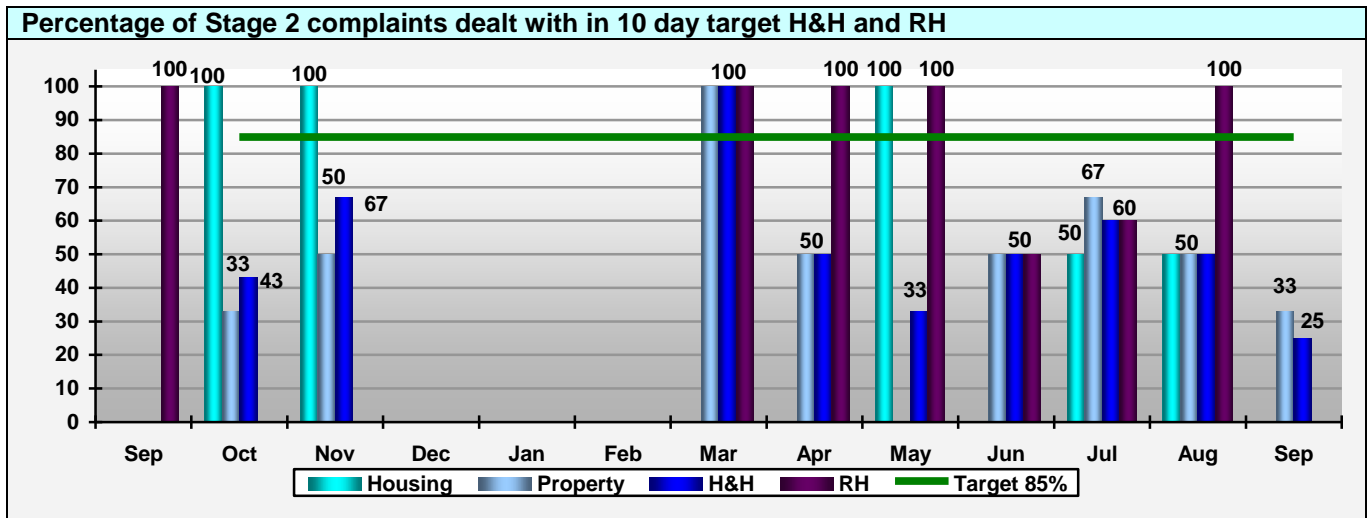


6.3 Few complaints escalate to Stage 2. During the last year H&H received a total of 35 Stage 2 complaints. H&H are able to provide a breakdown of Stage 2 complaints by directorate and service area as shown in the table above. Property Services received 26 Stage 2 complaints of which half were for Capital Works/Decent Homes. Housing Services received a total of nine Stage 2 complaints.

6.4 The former RH service received fewer Stage 2 complaints, a total of 13. The report provided by RH shows volume and performance across the service.

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The RH performance reports do not provide a breakdown by directorate or service area for further scrutiny.



6.5 As with Stage 1 complaints escalated complaints also require a response to the complaint within 10 days. The corporate target for responses is 85%. H&H has had and continues to have problems in responding to complaints within this timeframe and achieved only 43%. Compared to this RH completed 77% of Stage 2 complaints within the ten days.

6.6 Stage 2 complaints by their very nature are more complex and do require further investigation at a more senior level. Although for H&H performance in this area is weak the senior officers lean towards ensuring a thorough response for the complainant and to prevent further complaint escalation. This is usually the reason for exceeded the corporate timescales.

6.7 The average turnaround of a Stage 2 complaint is 13.5 days within H&H.

Stage 3 Complaints H&H & RH

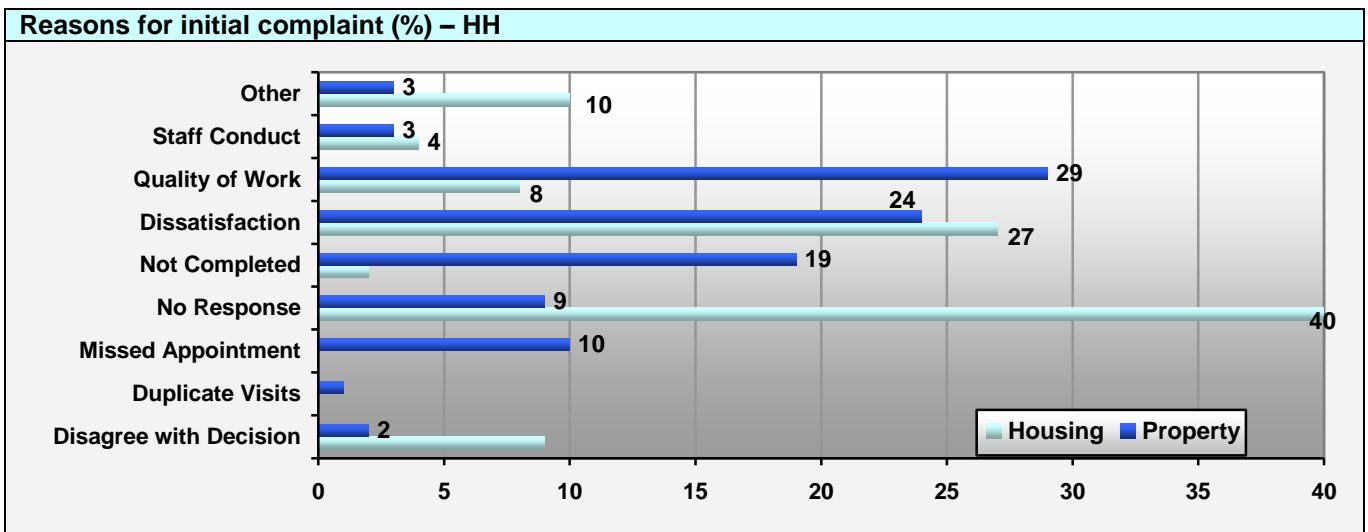
7.1 The effectiveness of the investigation at Stage 2 is evident as H&H and RH received very few Stage 3 complaints. For this reporting period H&H received only two Stage 3 complaints.

7.2 Of the two Stage 3 complaints one related to anti-social behaviour and the other was repairs. Both were only considered at the Initial Assessment Panel (AIP) and did not proceed to a full hearing. Both complaints were not upheld.

7.3 For the same period RH received only three Stage 3 complaints. Of the three complaints, two related to the tenancy and one is housing needs. Two were not upheld and one is still ongoing.

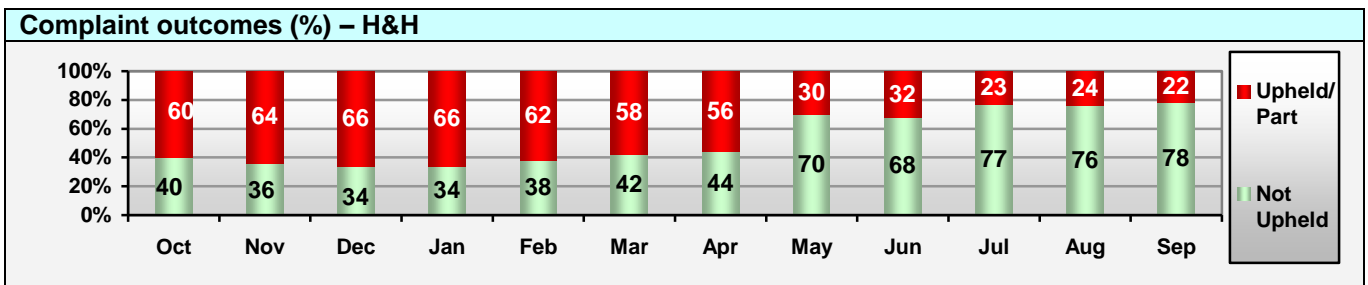
7.4 Although performance in this area is high the Council will continue to deliver a high standard of service around complaint handling and implement further improvements.

Reasons for initial Complaint H&H (Informal and Stage 1)



8.1 All complaints which are logged are categorised for the reason for dissatisfaction. Overall quality of work is the major reason for complaint although there are differences between the two service departments. Within Housing Services 40% of complaints are regarding a lack of response or communication, while in Property Services 29% are concerned with the quality of work.

Outcomes H&H



9.1 To enable better learning all complaints are assessed as to whether they were upheld or not. All complaints are monitored and scrutinised at weekly managers meetings. It is likely that this process acts as an early warning system and is one of the reasons why the vast majority of complaints do not escalate to Stage 2.

9.2 For example earlier in the year the scrutiny process identified an increase in complaints about kitchen refurbishments by one particular contractor. Following the identification of this trend meetings were set up with the contractor to identify the problems and since then complaints have fallen significantly.

9.3 Complaints remain open and subject to monitoring until all the issues are resolved and it is only at this point that the decision is taken whether the complaint is upheld or not. In 2012/13 61% of all complaints were upheld.

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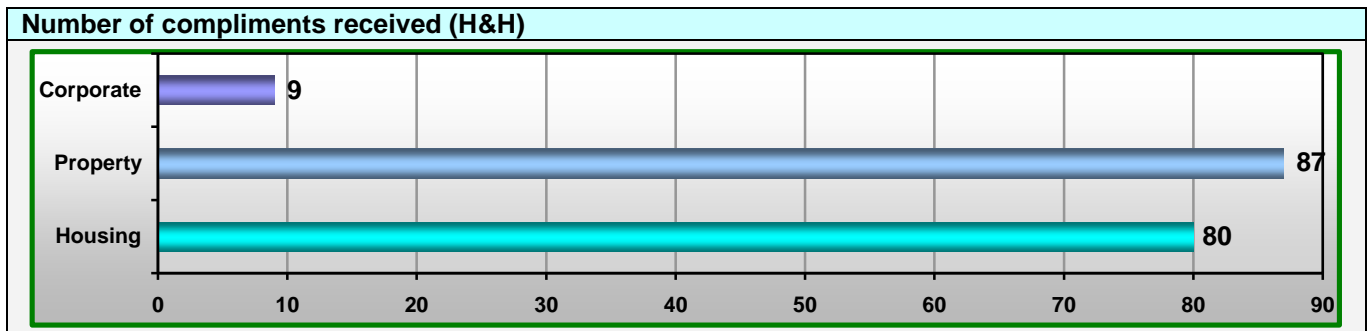
9.4 Unfortunately the corporate complaints system (CRM) does not have the facility to identify upheld or not upheld although this can be entered manually.

Local Government Ombudsman/Housing Ombudsman H&H and RH

10.1 Since April 2013 the Housing Ombudsman service has been launched with responsibility for all housing complaints. Between April 2013 and September 2013 the Housing Service has received 12 enquiries from the Ombudsman. The LGO has not formally investigated any of these as they have all either been referred to the Council's complaints procedure or the complainant has been advised that the matter they have raised is outside the jurisdiction of the LGO/HO.

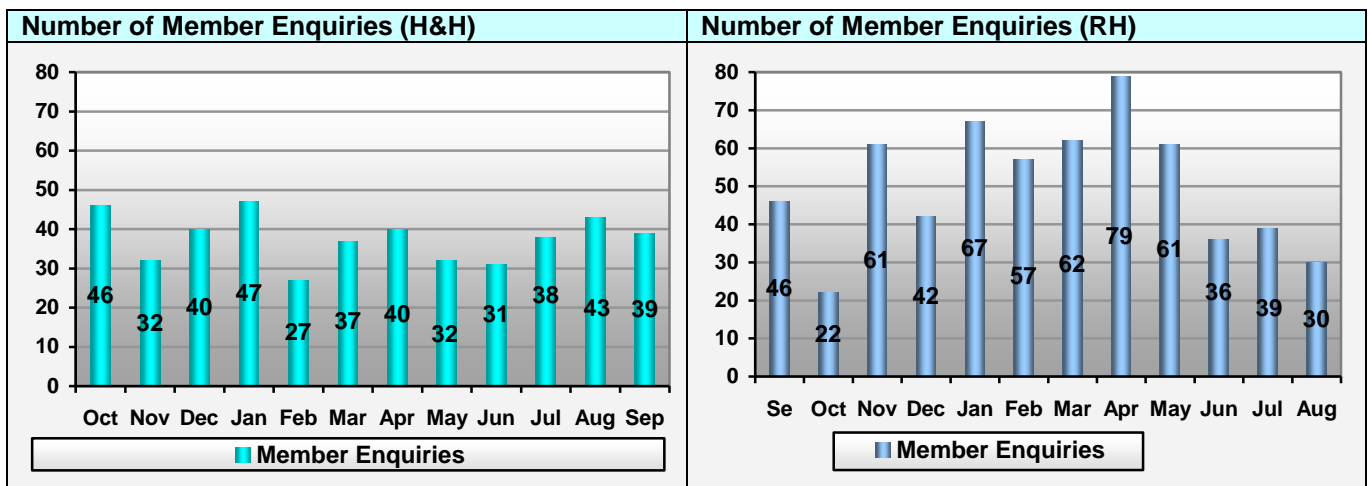
10.2 This is an excellent performance by the Housing Service, and is in part testimony to the work of the Councils Complaints and Quality Assurance Teams and the robustness of the processes.

Compliments



11.1 Complaints are one side of insight into how services are performing but also compliments provide further feedback. In the last twelve months 176 compliments have been made by residents to H&H. Compliments are not currently logged by RH on CRM although they are recorded separately. Since May ten compliments have been recorded.

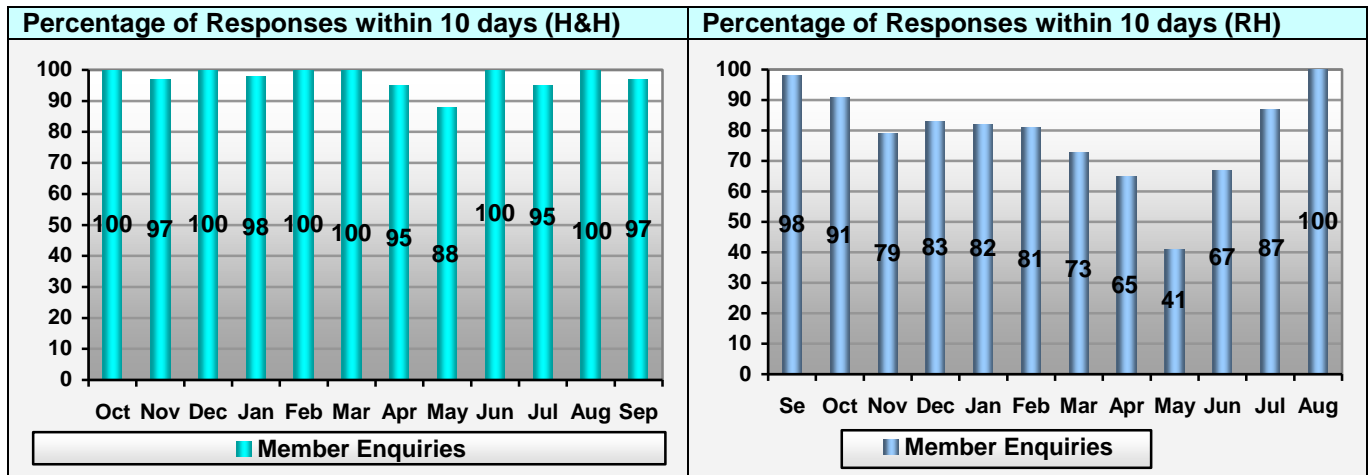
Members Enquiries



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12.1 In the last twelve months 436 Member Enquiries were received in H&H and 602 by RH. There is a target to respond within 10 working days. In the last year the H&H has achieved 98% of responses within ten days which meets the corporate response target of 95% while the RH was 76%. Overall across Homes and Housing 85% of all Members Enquiries are responded to within 10 working days.

12.2 All Member enquiries which are not fully resolved within the 10 working days are placed within a similar monitoring process as that with complaints. Members are updated on progress and the enquiry is only closed once it is fully resolved.



13.1 In April 2013, the Housing Service was moved as part of the Senior Management Restructure into the Children’s Adults and Housing Department. It is proposed that there should be one Complaints Service for the whole of the department, and therefore the Quality Assurance Team and the Complaints Officers on the former Retained Housing side will be transferred into a new Division within the overall department. This Division will be called the Business and Performance Service, Children’s, Adults and Housing.

13.2 Once the service has been brought together, the Group Director will bring forward proposals for restructuring the service to provide the most cost effective service dealing with members’ enquiries and complaints. This restructure is likely to take place in January 2014.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

There are none associated with this report, but the Service has been subject to various costs and penalties for findings made against it

Legal implications and risks:

There are none associated with this report though in some cases legal issues have needed to be addressed.

Human Resources implications and risks:

There are none associated with this report.

Equalities implications and risks:

There are none associated with this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None