

Audit and Standards Committee

20th July 2022

Title: Information Governance Annual Report	
Report of the Chief Operating Officer	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: None	Key Decision: No
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Accountable Director: Natalia Monvoisin; Head of Customer Contact	
Accountable Strategic Leadership Director: Judith Greenhalgh Strategic Director Community Solutions	
Summary This report is produced on an annual calendar year basis and provides data from January – December 2021 and provides insight into the work undertaken by the Customer Feedback Team. It incorporates information relating to complaints, members casework, Freedom of Information (FOI) and Subject Access Requests (SAR). It also aims to detail how as a council we perform against our performance targets in relation to complaints and members casework and how after reviewing them we identify and implement service improvements. Legislation dictates that an annual report is separately developed and published for Care and Support.	
Recommendation: The Audit and Standards Committee is asked to note and comment on the contents of the report.	

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Customer Feedback Team are responsible for monitoring and tracking all complaints, members casework, Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests which are submitted. This report focuses on complaints and members casework as this is where we can gather the most insight into how we can continually improve our services delivered to residents and members.

- 1.2 All casework is tracked on the Council's complaints handling system I-Casework. This system was implemented in January 2016.
- 1.3 The council has a number of information governance processes which are managed by the Customer Feedback Team. The four main processes are set out below providing timescales and expected performance:

Complaints – The Council encourages complaints and has a corporate process which allows residents to raise concerns. This process has two stages, in the first stage, which many raise through our online form, we aim to respond within 10 working days.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the answer, they receive at stage one they may within 28 days of the response ask for a review. The aim is to respond to a request for a review within 30 working days and if this target cannot be met a progress report will be sent.

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the response they can approach the Ombudsman or the Housing Ombudsman Service if the complaint is about housing.

The performance target for all complaints is currently to answer 90% within the timeframes described.

In addition to this process, there are certain services where there is a statutory complaints process that has to be followed and these are for complaints regarding:

- Adult social care services
- Children's social services
- Schools
- Councillors
- Reports of fraud

Members Casework – Both elected members of parliament and councillors can submit casework from their residents. This casework has a 10-working day target for a response. The performance target for response is currently 90% within this time frame.

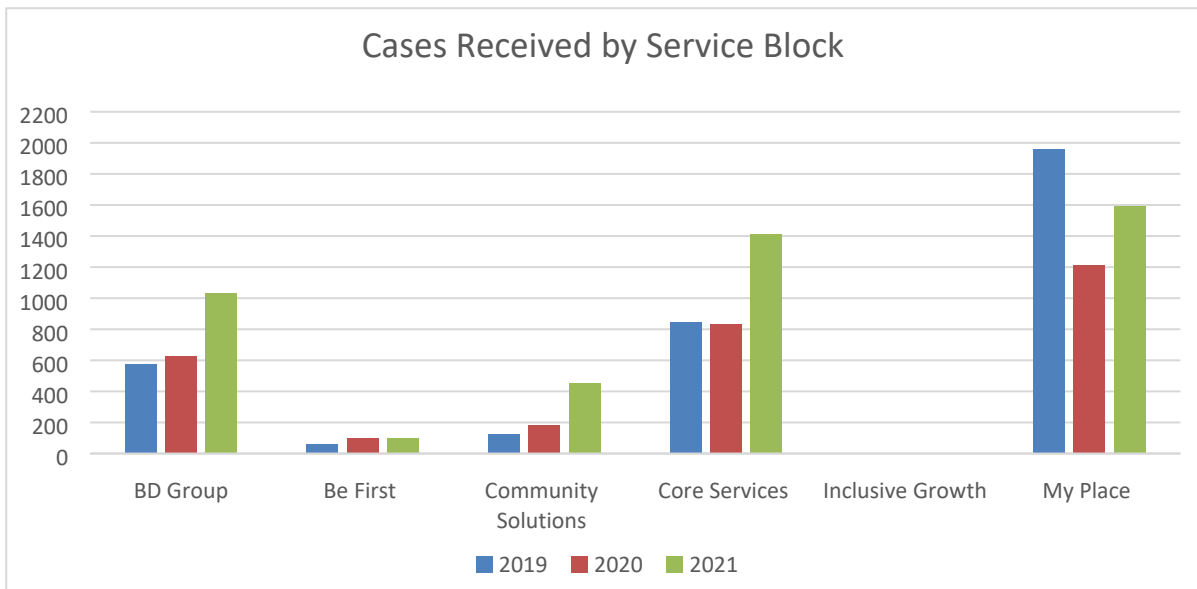
Freedom of Information/Environmental Information Regulations – Under the Freedom of Information Act, the council must make available to applicants' information which is held. This Act does allow for the council, if necessary, to apply exemptions to certain requests. The timeline for dealing with requests is currently 20 working days. The performance target for FOI's and EIR's is set by the Information Commissioners Office, and they currently expect that 95% of requests are dealt within these time frames.

Subject Access Requests – Under the General Data Protection Regulations the council have to allow for any information which is held on a person to be made available to them upon request. Once a request is received, we have one calendar month to provide all relevant information. The performance target for SAR's is 90% within this timeframe.

2. Corporate Complaints

- 2.1 Whilst reviewing the data which is included in this report it is important to note the number of services we provide to our residents and consider the number of complaints alongside this information. For example, we pick up 77,136 bins per week and this generated 581 complaints over the year. This translates to only 1.1% **of workload** generating complaints.
- 2.2 The data below shows complaints received by service area. This does not include Care and Support; legislation dictates that separate annual reports are developed and published for these services.
- 2.3 The number of complaints increased significantly (+55%) in 2021 vs. 2020, comparing data to 2019 vs 2021 also shows an increase of 29% although this is concerning, a large part of this increase could be associated to the Covid-19 pandemic, where at the height of the pandemic in 2020 residents were less likely to contact us and to make dissatisfaction known. This period seemed to have ushered in a new breed of “sympathetic customer” – though this has proved to be a temporary phenomenon. Research conducted by the LGO cited: “As consumers we realise that companies are having to cope with an extraordinary array of challenges due to the pandemic and lockdown. It appears that this awareness has made us more tolerant of problems and delays, more patient, more understanding – and much less likely to complain”.
- 2.4 73% of complaints were answered within timescale. This is below the corporate target of 90%

	2019	2020	2021
BD Group	574	625	1033
Be First	64	99	100
Community Solutions	123	181	454
Core Services	845	835	1414
Inclusive Growth	2	6	6
My Place	1,958	1,216	1,595
Total	3,566	2,962	4,602



2.5 The table below shows the outcome for each complaint received which has been responded to. Upheld complaints provide a good basis for us to consider how we can improve services offered. You will note that the figures below differ from our overall complaints total. This is due to a small number of complaints remaining open and therefore no outcome can be provided.

Outcomes from Complaints		
Upheld	1659	36%
Not Upheld	1582	34%
Partly Upheld	930	20%
Resolved at first point of contact	25	0.5%
Withdrawn	226	5%
TOTAL	4422	

2.6 In 2020, we upheld 50% of complaints whilst this year we have further decreased this figure to 36%. When we consider the increase of complaints being over 50% year on year, decreasing our upheld rate is positive, showing we are driving continuous improvement whilst balancing large volume increases.

2.7 It should also be noted that 19% of the complaints which are submitted relate to our Refuse Service. As these relate to missed bin collections, in the main they are upheld unless we have sufficient evidence to suggest that the missed collection was due to a resident fault. Of the 1659 upheld complaints 624 are missed bins, meaning only 1,035 complaints have been upheld against other services.

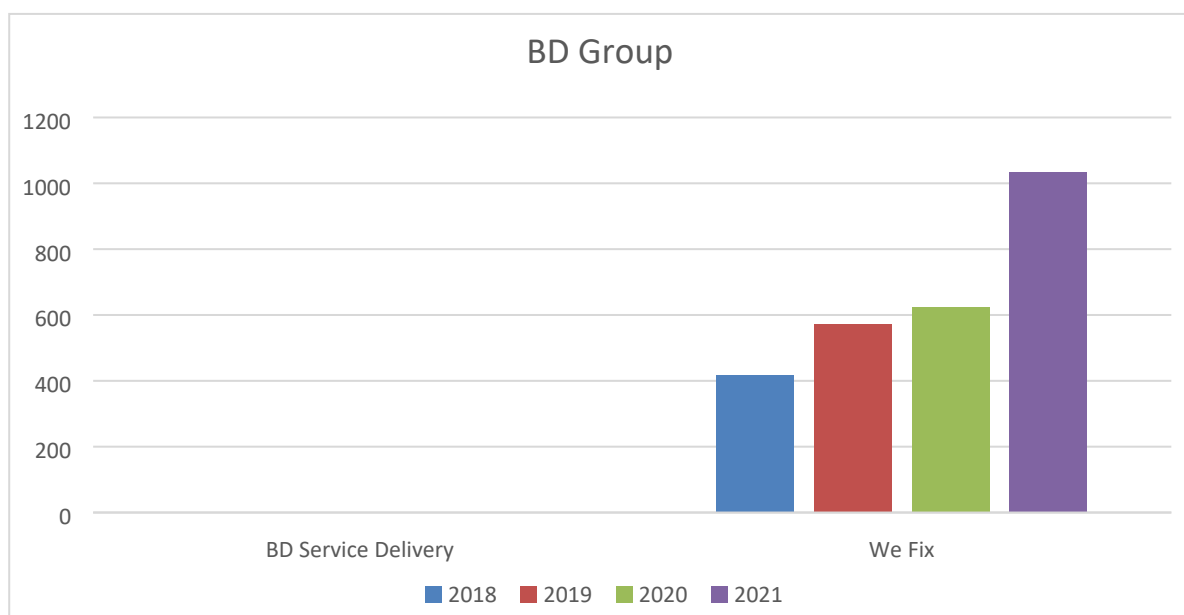
Service Block	% Of upheld cases
BD Group	24%
Be First	1%
Community Solutions	6%
Core Services	19%
Inclusive Growth	0.06%
My Place	50%

2.8 The Local Authority continue to strive to learn from the complaints data and as part of this we have set up improvement meetings with our key service areas in which

we receive a high level of complaints. One example of this is our meetings which are held with our partners BD Group. This is focusing on learning from complaints and turning this learning into service improvements, for example BD Group have implemented an internal tracker which is considering all aspects of a complaint and the root causes for the complaint being raised. This key information is being used to track key service areas which are generating high levels of complaints compared against the others. So that focus and attention can be given to improve the journey our residents have to take.

3. BD Group

Stage 1 Complaints Received BD Group		
	2020	2021
BD Service Delivery	0	0
We Fix	625	1,033
Total	625	1,033



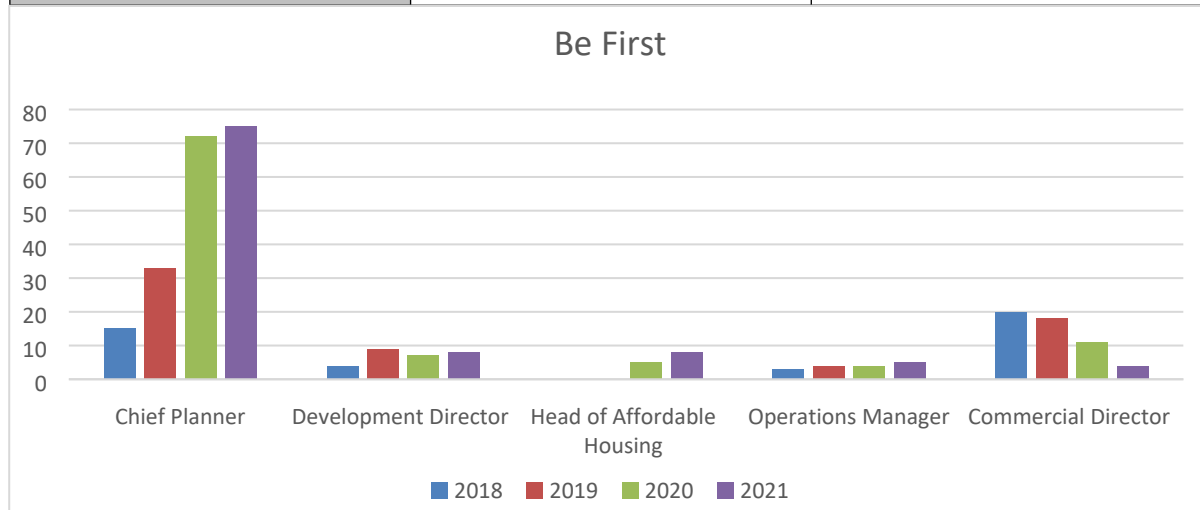
3.1 BD Group offers paid services to schools including catering and cleaning as well as repairs and maintenance. We Fix undertakes housing repairs for the council's housing stock.

3.2 When we consider the complaints which are submitted by our residents there are several themes which are prominent; delays in appointments occurring, follow on works not been scheduled and dissatisfaction with the works undertaken. These themes remain consistent year on year and in our development work with BD Group these concerns remain a topic of conversation into how we can address these using the tools we have in place currently but considering also what steps need to be taken to ensure these themes are addressed fully. An example of the positive work undertaken was the drive to employ more multi-skilled tradespeople who can attend jobs and undertake more than one service allowing for jobs to be completed faster. BD Group have this year gone through a change in structure including the hiring of a Customer Liaison Manager who is specifically looking at complaints data and trends and providing insight into how services can manage better.

- 3.3 We remain aware that there are jobs outstanding which have been brought to the attention of the Local Authority by residents. BD Group are addressing these via regular monitoring and seeking support from contractors to assist with undertaking works. Review of the workforce has also been ongoing with BD Group hiring operatives who can continue to address jobs as they are raised. We should also note that due to the Pandemic certain materials required were difficult to source which has further impacted on timescales.
- 3.4 The council does not record complaints which relate to the other services provided by the rest of the BD Group.
- 3.5 Of those complaints received for We Fix 67.8% were completed within timescale.
- 3.6 In terms of case outcomes, 20.8% were not upheld, 30.9% partly upheld, 38.3% upheld and 4.1% withdrawn.

4. Be First

Stage 1 Complaints Received Be First		
	2020	2021
Chief Planner	72	75
Development Director	7	8
Head of Affordable Housing	5	8
Operations Manager	4	5
Commercial Director	11	4
Total	99	100



- 4.1 Be First offers a range of services including Building Control, Planning Applications, Regeneration of Council Stock and Regeneration of the Local Area.
- 4.2 The main issue which reported is delays within Building Control and functional problems with the Planning Portal.
- 4.3 Chief Planner by a significant number continues to bring the most complaints for Be First as they deal with residents directly for both submission of plans but also objections to planning applications.

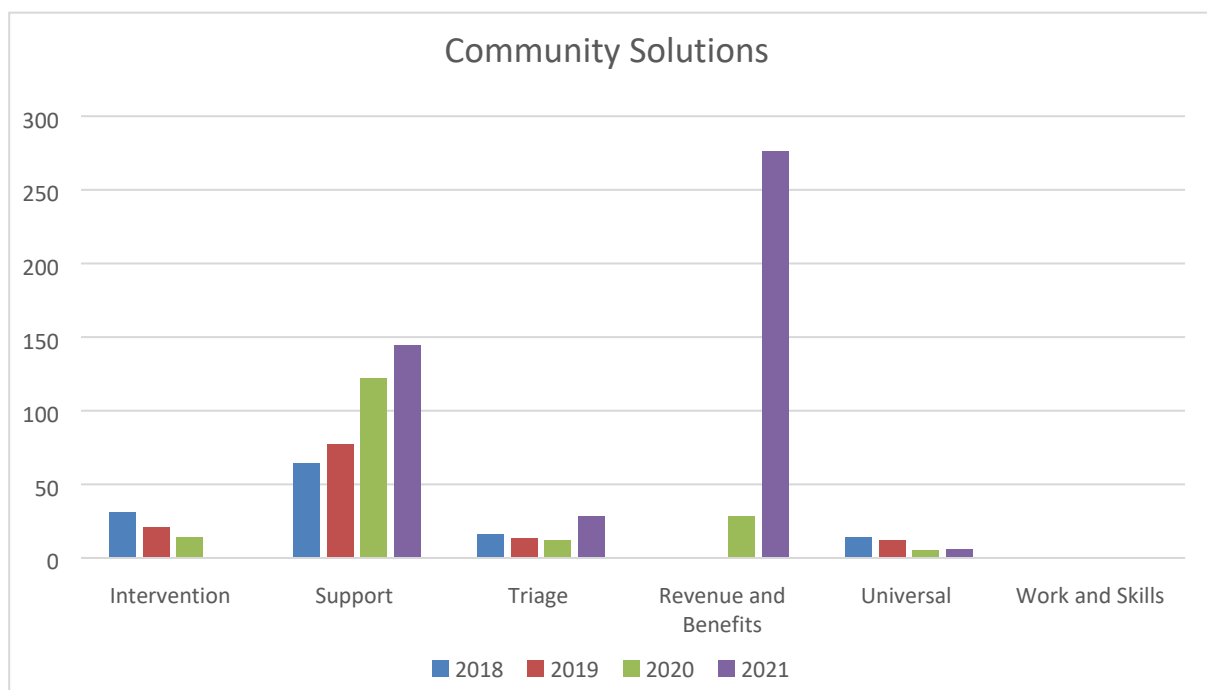
4.4 We are aware that significant process improvement is required concerning how defects are managed post the 12-month period to ensure issues are resolved in a timely manner with minimal impact on the residents.

4.5 Of the complaints received for Be First 65% were answered within timescale.

4.6 36% were not upheld, 11% partly upheld, 19% upheld, and 11% withdrawn.

5. Community Solutions

Stage 1 Complaints Received Community Solutions		
	2020	2021
Intervention	14	0
Support	122	144
Triage	12	28
Revenue and Benefits	28	276
Universal	5	6
Work and Skills	0	0
Total	181	454



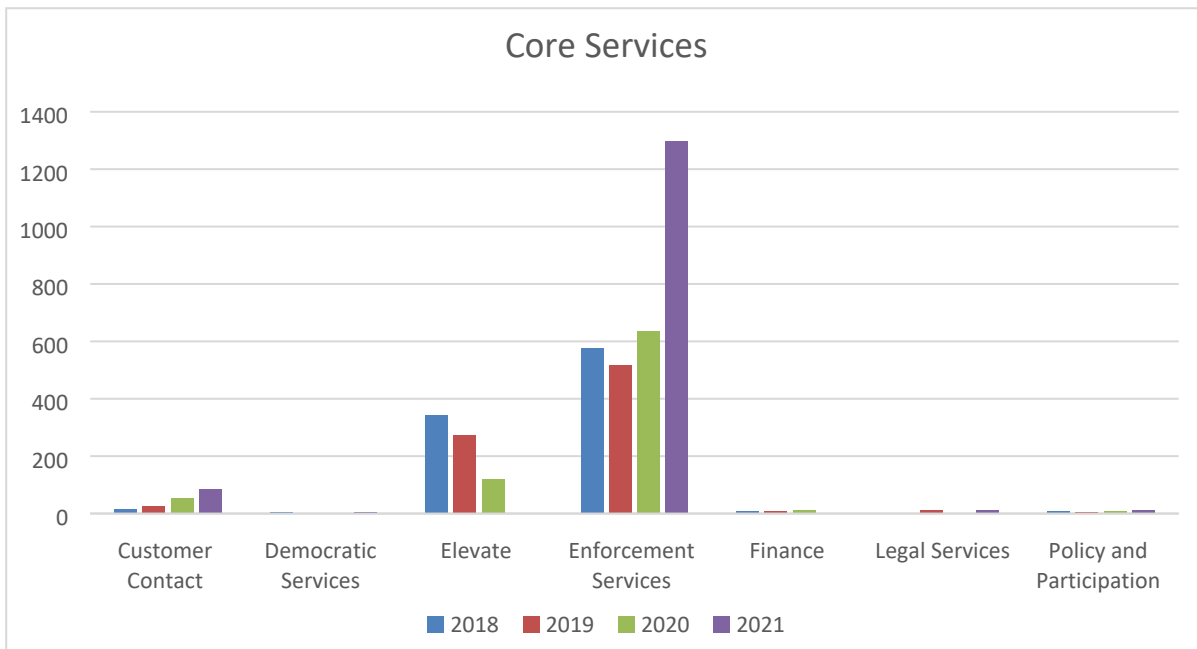
5.1 Community Solutions offers a range of services for our residents including maintaining housing allocations, tenancy sustainment, early intervention services and the Home and Money Hub which offers valuable advice and support to those residents who require financial assistance.

5.2 Anti-Social Behaviour complaints rose significantly during the second phase of lockdowns and because of this Community Solutions officers worked with Core Service officers reviewing the offer and process for ASB concerns. This has led to the development of a specific team to assist and triage these issues. The lockdowns also brought a similar level of requests for the Housing Allocations Service with requests for moves to suitable properties.

- 5.3 There are several reasons for the spike in complaints for Revenues and Benefits from 2020-2021; In 2021 Revenues and Benefits were fully integrated into the Council from Elevate. Additionally, the change in support via various grants and legislation under Covid 19 being withdrawn meant more contact was being made. For example, the ability to apply for furlough officially ended in September 2021 meaning residents regardless of working status were receiving no additional funds but were still expected to pay council tax and rent, understandably levels of dissatisfaction rose during this period.
- 5.3 Tenancy sustainment relates to Anti-Social Behaviour between neighbours, residents complain that when issues are reported they are not dealt with as they would like.
- 5.4 Housing allocations and the time taken to get allocated is an ongoing theme and in the main relates to the wait for appropriate housing. Those who are applicable to bid for housing will raise concerns that when bidding they are not being successful and complain that they are having to wait extended periods of time.
- 5.5 Of those complaints received within Community Solutions 80.1% were answered within timescale.
- 5.6 In terms of case outcomes 45.8% were not upheld, 16.9% partly upheld, 21.5% upheld, 1.5% resolved at first point of contact and 9.2% withdrawn.

6. Core Services

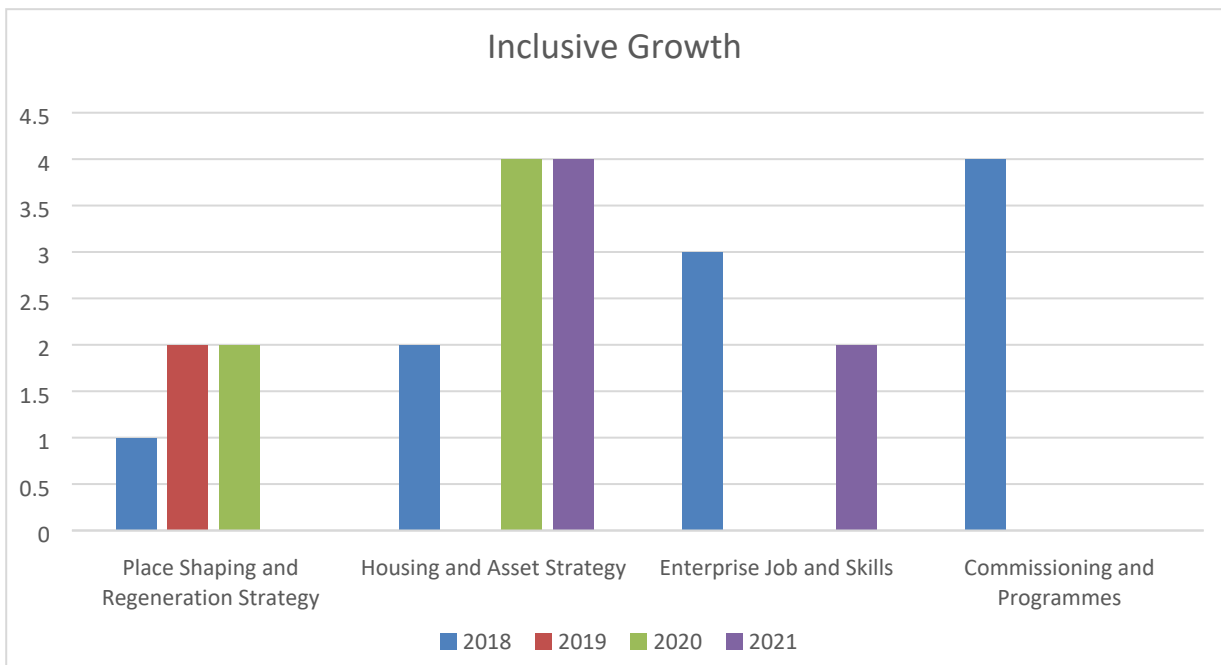
Stage 1 Complaints Received Core Services		
	2020	2021
Customer Contact	55	85
Democratic Services	0	6
Enforcement Services	635	1298
Finance	13	1
Legal Services	3	13
Policy and Participation	9	11
Total	835	1,414



- 6.1 Core Services is a grouping of services which provide several essential services to our residents including parking and street enforcement.
- 6.2 Core Services maintain the contract for our leisure centres and residents are directed to submit complaints about these individual services to the centres directly.
- 6.3 Year on year that Enforcement Services are generating the largest number of complaints. This is not surprising due to the number of services housed under this directorate, dealing with issues relating to parking, street enforcement and private sector housing. In 2021 we are reporting an increase of 104.4%.
- 6.4 Parking Services have dealt with 74% of all complaints for Enforcement Services which is a substantial % for one service area. We are aware that Parking is always going to be a large generator of dissatisfaction, it is a very emotive subject and affects residents and visitors to the borough. This has been further exacerbated due to the start of a cost-of-living crisis, the removal of furlough and other government support.
- 6.5 The Customer Feedback Team have been working with parking services directly, refining the process on what constitutes a complaint. Parking has several legislative paths which need to be followed by those who receive a penalty, and it is not always correct to follow the complaint pathway.
- 6.5 Of those complaints received in Core Services 65.4% were answered within timescale.
- 6.6 In terms of case outcomes, 21.9% were upheld, 15.9% partly upheld, 49.2% not upheld, 0.5% resolved at first point of contact and 6.4% withdrawn.

7. Inclusive Growth

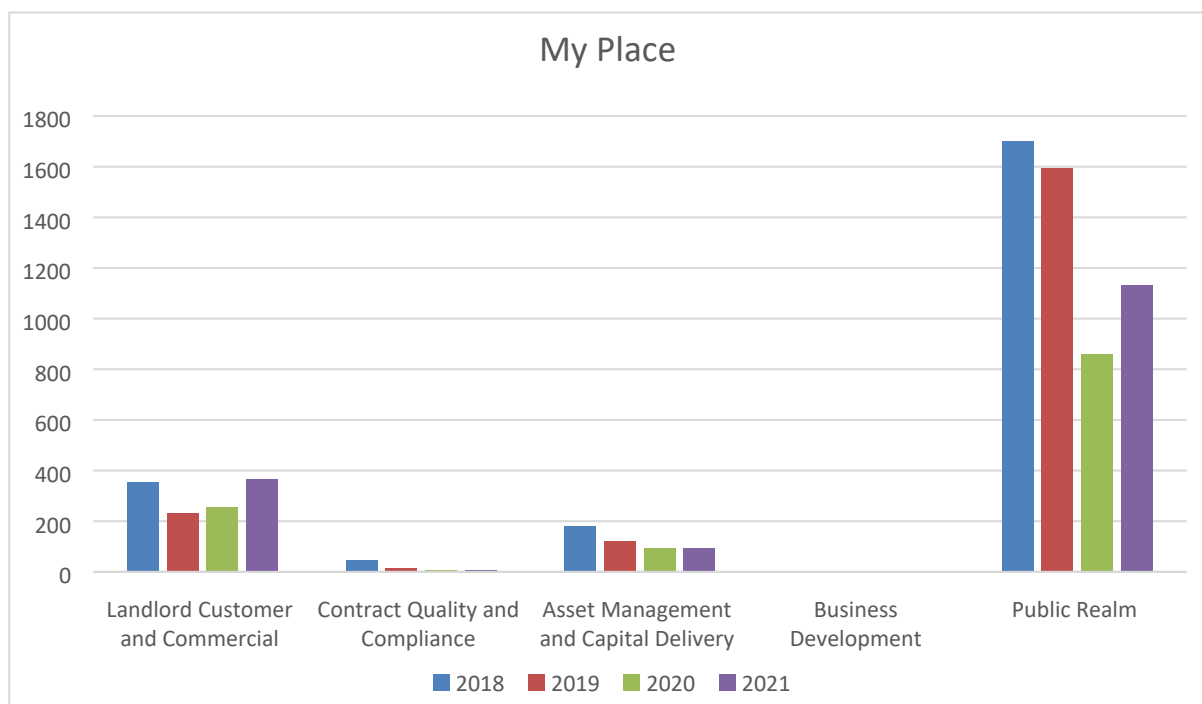
Stage 1 Complaints Received Inclusive Growth		
	2020	2021
Place Shaping and Regeneration Strategy	2	0
Housing and Asset Strategy	4	4
Enterprise Job and Skills	0	2
Commissioning and Programmes	0	0
Total	6	6



- 7.1 Inclusive Growth has 3 key priorities; develop our aspirational and affordable housing offer, shape great places and strong communities through regeneration, encourage enterprise and enable employment. As a commissioning function they do not directly deliver services.
- 7.2 This is a service which has a real impact on the Borough helping to deliver our strategy and vision. As a mainly strategic function, they are not customer facing and receive a minimal number of complaints.
- 7.3 Of the six complaints which were received in this area 16.6% were answered within timescale.
- 7.4 The case outcomes 16.6% were not upheld, 16.6% partly upheld and 16.6% upheld.

8. My Place

Stage 1 Complaints Received My Place		
	2020	2021
Landlord Customer and Commercial	255	367
Contracts Quality and Compliance	7	5
Asset Management and Capital Delivery	93	91
Business Development	2	2
Public Realm	859	1130
Total	1,216	1,595



- 8.1 My Place is responsible for maintaining a large range of front facing services. They manage and provide all Public Realm services which include refuse collections, street cleansing as well as highways and landlord services for our tenants.
- 8.2 It is not surprising and in line with other authorities that My Place receives the most complaints.
- 8.3 We have reviewed the number of complaints which are received and 70.2% of these complaints relate to Public Realm. These teams offer services which are used by all tenants within the Borough and it should be noted that although we have seen an increase from 2020, we are still substantially lower than 2018 and 2019 in terms of cases received.
- 8.4 Reviewing the data for 2021, as in previous years the main themes relate to non-collection of waste, replacement bins and street cleansing. 2021 shows an increase of 34% but vs. 2019 this is a decrease of 29%. The numbers on their own show a positive story albeit not in line with expectations from residents.

8.5 In the latter part of 2021 the Strategic Director for My Place focused on complaints performance by setting up a daily 10-minute huddle with the team, holding them accountable for their complaint's performance. This message was clearly heard and actioned with Public Realm reporting 100% answered within timescale performance in December 2021.

8.5 Of those complaints received in My Place 80.7% were answered within timescale.

8.6 In terms of case outcomes, 17.7% were not upheld, 13.1% partly upheld, 0.4% resolved at first point of contact, 64.2% upheld and 3.6% withdrawn.

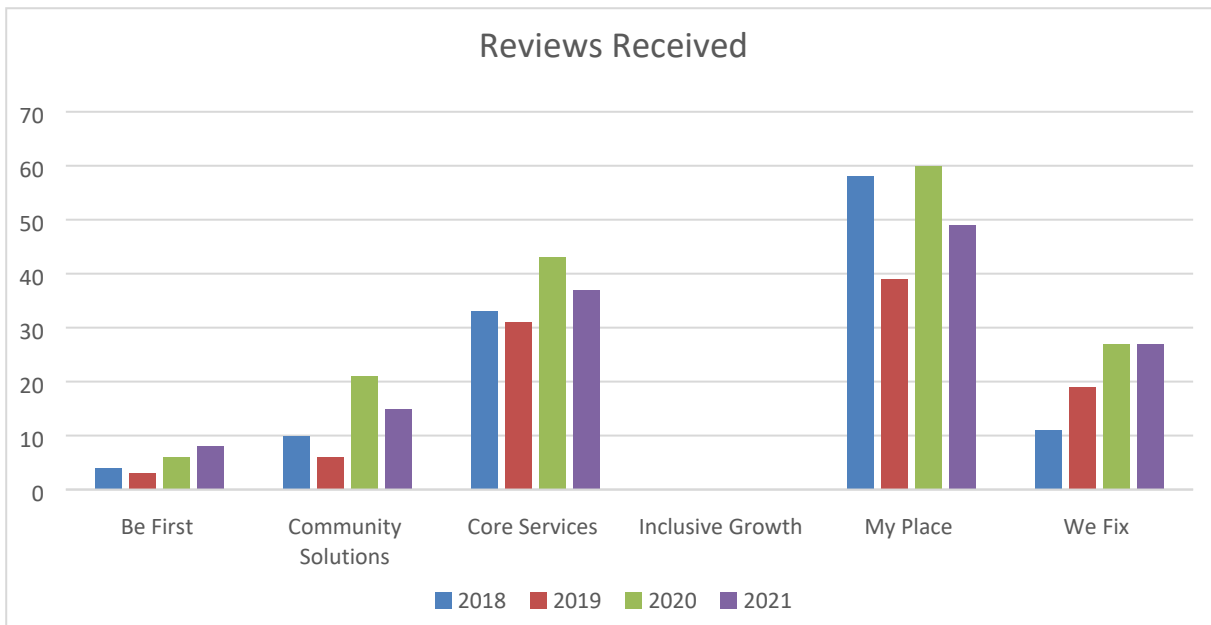
9. Reviews (Stage 2)

9.1 The Local Authority strives to undertake a full investigation into all complaints. On occasion complainants will feel that more could have been done and at this point the Local Authority offers a review. Reviews are undertaken by the Feedback Team as an independent service to ensure that a thorough investigation has been provided.

9.2 Only 3% of cases were reviewed in 2021, indicating that the Local Authority has provided a satisfactory resolution to the issue reported. An overview of the cases where reviews were requested show residents felt that the initial responses did not meet expectations in terms of offering clear and deliverable actions. Responses on occasion also failed to clearly respond to all reported issues and residents quite rightly questioned this and asked for further review of the complaint. It should be noted that this further review has provided the relevant detail as the number of complainants referring to statutory bodies such as the LGO or Housing Ombudsman has not risen.

9.3 In 2021 we have seen a decrease in the number of reviews by 13% from 2020 the spread across the teams asking for reviews remains static. **The top 3 service areas are repairs (27), parking (25), landlord services (18) meaning that 51% of our requests relate to 3 teams.** As we can note from the context in this report around the stage 1 complaints received it would not be considered unusual for these areas to feature as they generate the largest numbers throughout the year.

Reviews Received		
	2020	2021
Be First	6	8
Community Solutions	21	15
Core Services	43	37
Inclusive Growth	0	0
My Place	60	49
We Fix	27	27
Total	157	136



10. Local Government Ombudsman

10.1 In relation to Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints an annual report is shared with the Local Authority which is produced directly by the LGO. This report highlights how many cases were received and the decisions made on those cases. For further information on these are published at the following link www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/london-borough-of-barking-dagenham/annualletters/

10.2 From the cases which were submitted to the LGO the table below shows those cases which required detailed investigations. The LGO produce annual reports on a financial year rather than calendar year.

LGO Detailed Investigations	
Not Upheld	1
Upheld	11
Total	12

10.3 We have compared the number of detailed investigations carried out in neighbouring boroughs so that a comparison can be undertaken on our performance.

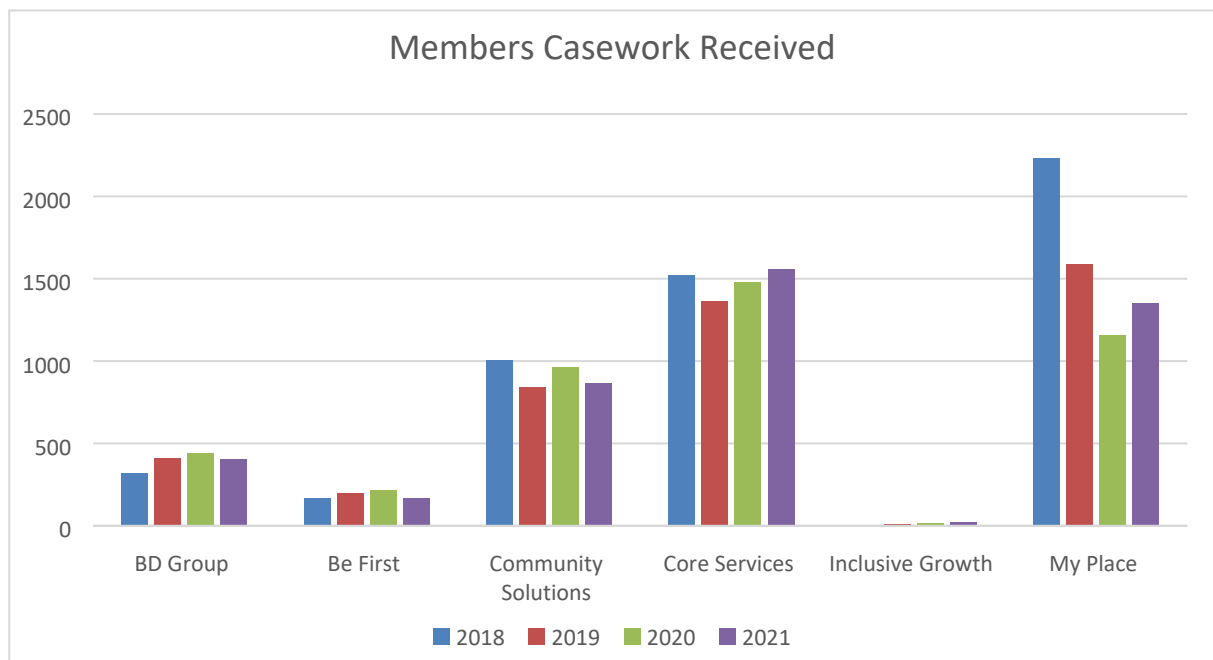
Benchmarking Data – Detailed Investigations	
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	15
London Borough of Redbridge	31
London Borough of Havering	18
London Borough of Newham	26

11. Members Casework

11.1 There is a comprehensive members casework system in place to answer Councillors and Members of Parliament queries and concerns. We aim to respond to 90% of these cases in 10 working days

11.2 A small increase of 3% in casework received is reported within 2021. 78% of casework was answered within timescale. This is below our stated target of 90%.

Members Casework Received		
	2020	2021
BD Group	438	406
Be First	214	169
Community Solutions	961	865
Core Services	1,481	1,559
Inclusive Growth	15	23
My Place	1,158	1,353
Total	4,267	4,375



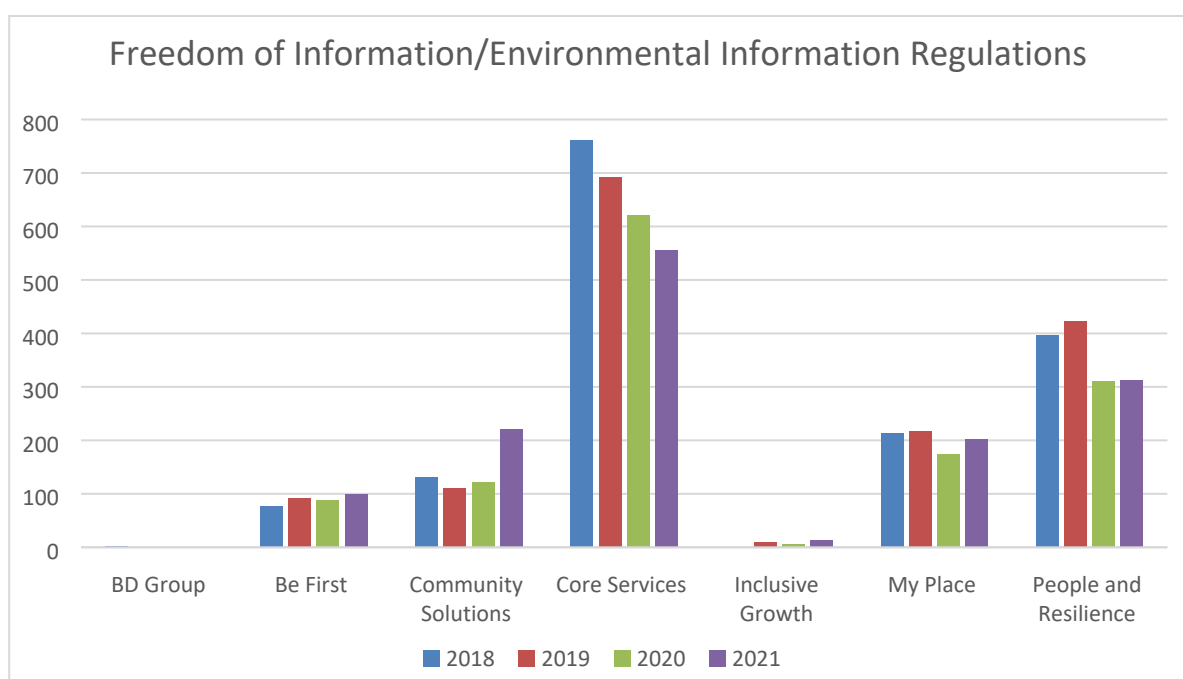
11.3 Member case work, in the main, mirrors that of our complainants who write to us directly aside from the inclusion of housing allocations and the associated wait time for these properties.

11.4 A significant increase of 16.8% is reported for My Place from 2020. This is not surprising as this particular directorate contains a vast number of services which our residents utilise such as street cleansing, refuse and landlord services.

11.5 We continue to try and work proactively with the elected members to ensure that we address the issues which are being raised with them.

12. Freedom of Information Requests

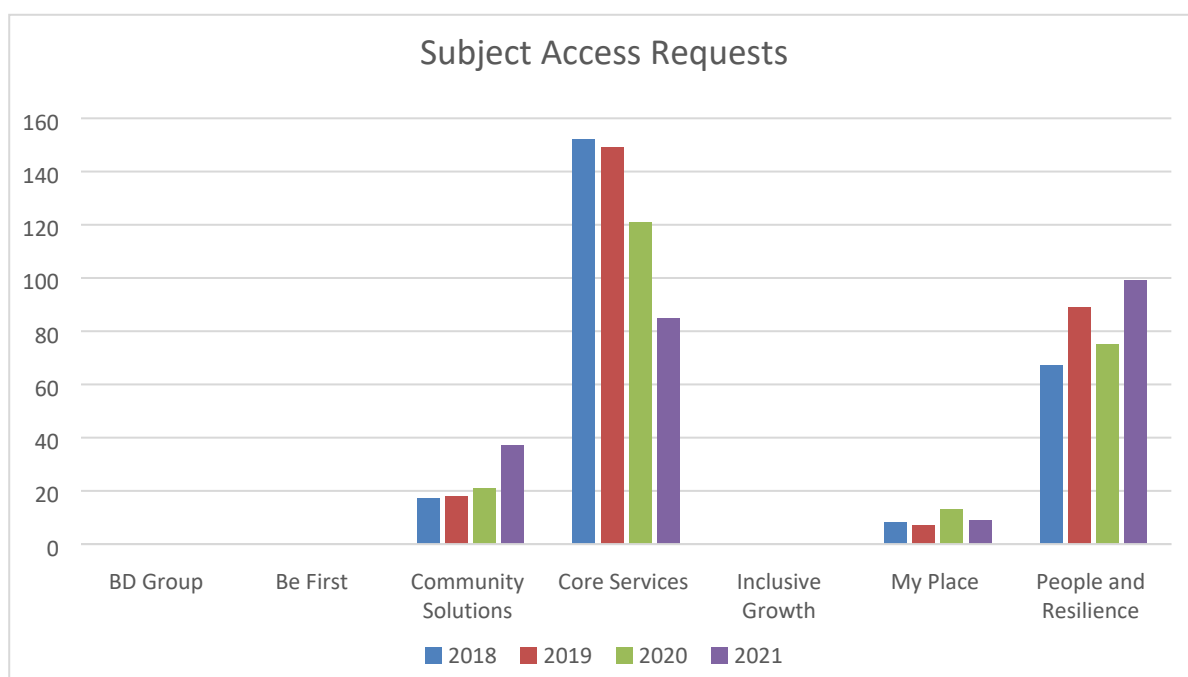
Freedom of Information/EIR Received		
	2020	2021
BDTP	0	0
Be First	89	100
Community Solutions	121	220
Core Services	621	555
Inclusive Growth	5	13
My Place	174	202
People and Resilience	310	313
Total	1,320	1,403



- 12.1 In line with the Information Commissioners Office guidance, the council now publish all FOI and EIR's which have been responded on the Council's website.
- 12.2 We have seen an increase in FOI's which have been received in 2021 by 6%.
- 12.3 The highest volume of FOI's received continues year on year to be Core Services and People and Resilience receiving 61.8% (868 of 1403). Finance received the highest volume of enquires with 8% of the overall total these requests relate to all areas of the Local Authority and include information requested on grants received and cost of running services. Education received 5% with requests including school admissions data and exclusions.
- 12.4 We should note the increase for Community Solutions which is related to the integration of Revenues and Benefits, who yearly receive a large portion of requests related to business grants, general income and council tax revenue.
- 12.5 Of those FOI and EIR's received 85.3% (1197 of 1403) were completed within timescale.

13. Subject Access Requests

Subject Access Requests Received		
	2020	2021
BD Group	0	0
Be First	0	0
Community Solutions	21	37
Core Services	121	85
Inclusive Growth	0	0
My Place	13	9
People and Resilience	75	99
Total	230	230



13.1 This year we have noted an increase of 32% in the number of cases received within People and Resilience area which covers both Adult and Children Social Care files. Year on year both social care and CCTV are the largest generator of requests covered by this legislation.

13.2 Of those Subject Access Requests received 88.6% (204 of 230) were completed within timescale.

14. Financial Implications

14.1 None

15. Legal Implications

15.1 None

16. Other Implications

16.1 None

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report

- None

List of appendices:

- Statutory Social Care Complaints Annual Report
- Action and Support from the Customer Feedback