

## Audit and Standards Committee

TBC

<b>Title:</b> Customer Feedback Team Annual Report	
<b>Report of the Chief Operating Officer</b>	
<b>Open Report</b>	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Wards Affected:</b> None	<b>Key Decision:</b> No
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<b>Accountable Strategic Leadership Director:</b> Alex Powell, Director of Strategy	
<b>Summary</b>  This report is produced on an annual calendar year basis from January – December 2022 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).  Additionally, its objective is to detail the council's performance in relation to complaints and members' casework targets, showcasing the process of reviewing and identifying areas for service enhancement, which are subsequently implemented to improve overall effectiveness.  Legislation dictates that an annual report is separately developed and published for Care and Support.	
<b>Recommendation:</b>  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 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 with timescales and expected performance:

**Complaints** – The Council actively promotes the submission of complaints and has established a corporate procedure that enables residents to voice their concerns and raise issues of importance.

This process has two stages; the first stage where many are raised through our online form and we aim to respond within 10 working days.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the answer they receive at stage one they may ask for a review within 28 days of the response. 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 to the resident directly to keep them informed.

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.

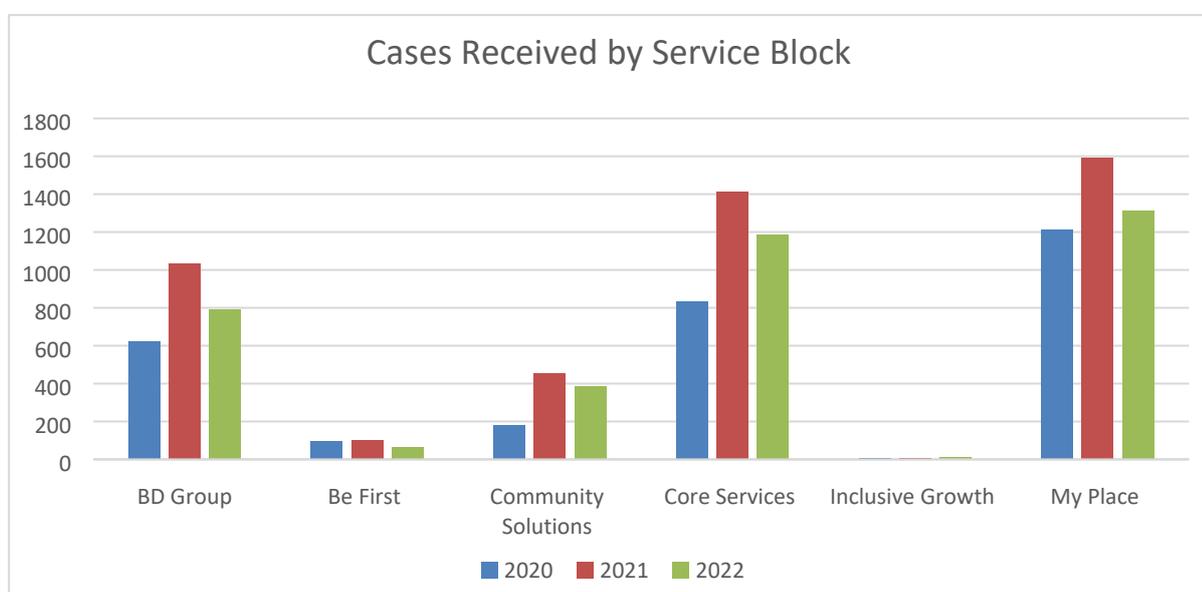
**Subject Access Requests** – Under the General Data Protection Regulations the council have to allow for any information which is held on a person to be made available to them upon request. Once a request is received, we have one calendar

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.
- 2.2 The data below shows complaints received by service area. This does not include Care and Support; legislation dictates that an annual separate report is developed and published for these services.
- 2.3 The number of complaints decreased (-18%) in 2022 vs 2021, this is a positive step and is bringing the Council back down in range to our historic figures from prior to the pandemic. We need to work towards decreasing this figure year on year to ensure that as a Council we are making service improvements based on the complaints we receive.
- 2.4 76% of complaints were answered within timescale. This is below the corporate target of 90%

	2020	2021	2022
<b>BD Group</b>	625	1033	793
<b>Be First</b>	99	100	64
<b>Community Solutions</b>	181	454	384
<b>Core Services</b>	835	1414	1,188
<b>Inclusive Growth</b>	6	6	11
<b>My Place</b>	1,216	1,595	1,316
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,962</b>	<b>4,602</b>	<b>3,756</b>



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.

<b>Outcomes from Complaints</b>		
Upheld	1579	42%
Not Upheld	1036	28%
Partly Upheld	516	14%
Resolved at first point of contact	18	0.5%
Withdrawn	137	3.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3286</b>	

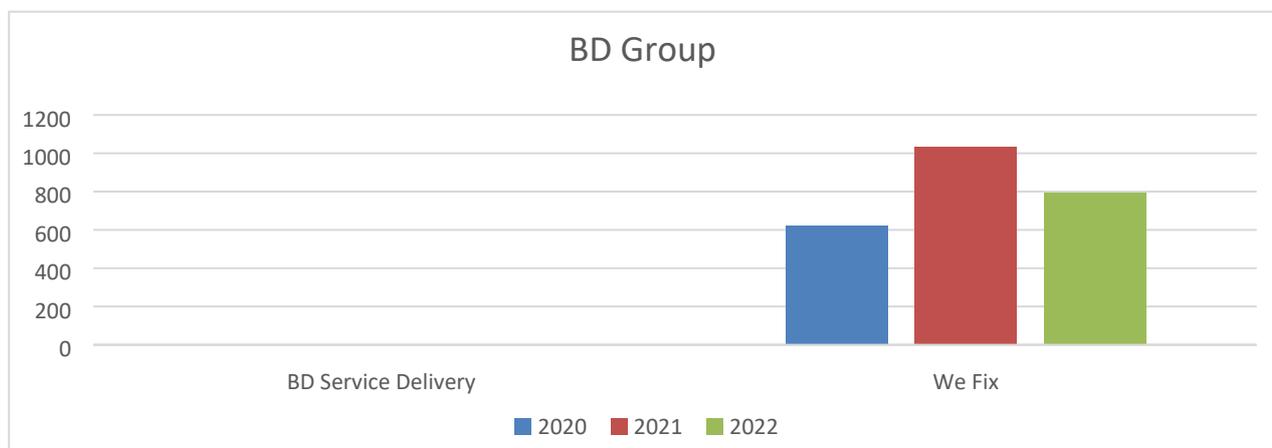
2.6 In 2022, we upheld 42% of complaints and whilst this is an increase on the previous year (2021 at 36%) we are still below 50%. While an increase is not ideal it shows that as a Council, we are undertaking thorough investigations and are able to identify where we can improve our services. It is how we translate the upheld complaints into real service improvements which indicates we are considering our customers and their journeys.

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 resident fault. Of the 1579 upheld complaints 701 (44%) are missed bins, meaning only 878 complaints have been upheld against other services.

2.8 As a Council we recognise the importance of a cycle of continuous learning from our complaints especially in those service areas which receive a high level of complaints. The drive for Customer Feedback is to improve the customer journey and satisfaction with the services we provide, to get the basics right. We work with high volume service areas considering the complaints received and the way in which we can address these to ensure a reduction in numbers but also improvements in service. An example of this is the improvement in Parking Services where a high volume of complaints would suggest that with the facility to be able to speak to a specialist parking telephony service would put the resident at ease. Parking have listened to this feedback and have implemented a dedicated parking services telephone line helping to reduce the traffic into the general contact centre and complaints, but more importantly allowing the resident a way to communicate which is effective at alleviating their concerns and resolving the issue at first point of contact.

### 3. BD Group

Stage 1 Complaints Received BD Group			
	2020	2021	2022
<b>BD Service Delivery</b>	0	0	0
<b>We Fix</b>	625	1,033	793
<b>Total</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>1,033</b>	<b>793</b>



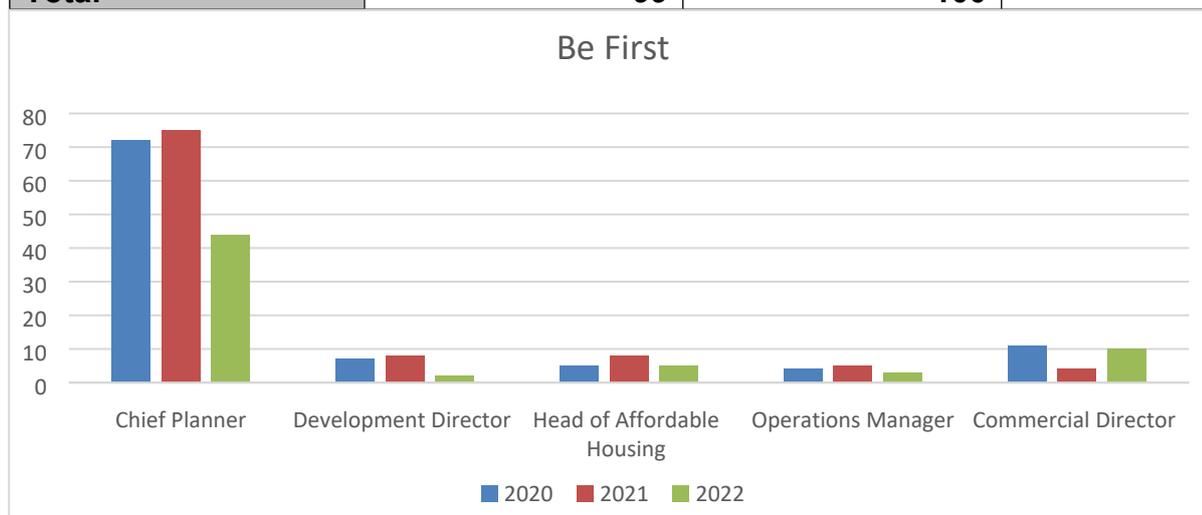
- 3.1 BD Group offers paid services to schools including catering and cleaning as well as repairs and maintenance. We Fix undertakes housing repairs for the council's housing stock.
- 3.2 Undertaking a review of the complaints submitted in 2022, we can see that as with previous years there are common themes which appear in a number of the complaints. These being follow on works not being scheduled, delays in initial appointments, dissatisfaction with the way the repair has been handled and due to a spotlight report from the Housing Ombudsman a clear increase in damp and mould cases being reported via the complaints system. These themes in the main are consistent year on year with the exception of the damp and mould cases which has become more prominent. We continue working with our colleagues in BD Group finding ways in which we can learn and therefore reduce the complaints which are submitted. This is having some impact as we can see a reduction in the number of complaints from 2021 by 23%. This work is by no way completed and we continue holding BD Group to account ensuring that we can see tangible actions which will positively impact on our residents.
- 3.3 BD Group continue to look for new ways to improve their overall service delivery. Engaging with contractors to support with clearing backlogged works and with our internal departments to resolve ongoing situations which are producing negative impact on the residents. One of these successes was the key fob process which was convoluted and involved numerous services. This process has now been changed to ensure a quicker turnaround for new fobs to be issued.
- 3.4 There is no quick fix for the repair and maintenance issues we are facing, however, working in partnership with BD Group we are both committed to working together and improving the customer experience from point of initial contact to the repair being completed.

3.5 The council does not record complaints which relate to the other services provided by the rest of the BD Group.

3.6 Of those complaints received for We Fix 79.5% were completed within timescale.

#### 4. Be First

Stage 1 Complaints Received Be First			
	2020	2021	2022
Chief Planner	72	75	44
Development Director	7	8	2
Head of Affordable Housing	5	8	5
Operations Manager	4	5	3
Commercial Director	11	4	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>64</b>



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 issues which are reported relating to Be First are complaints relating to the manner in which objections have been dealt with regarding planning and issues with building control providing certificates.

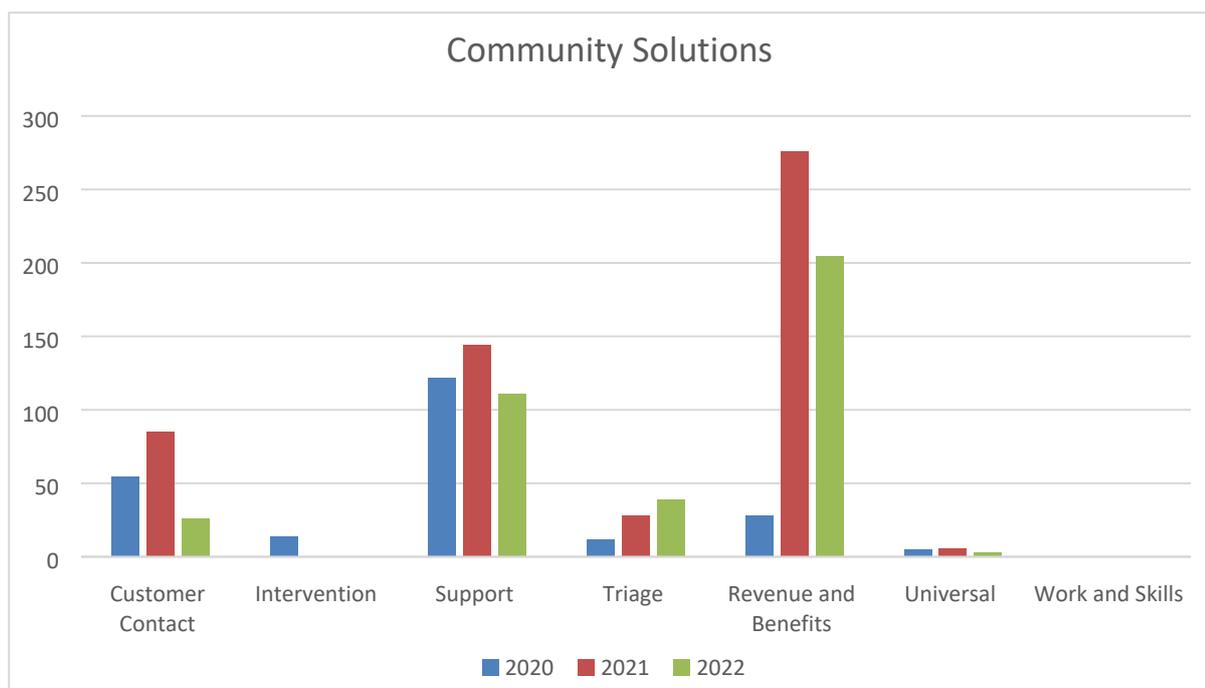
4.3 Chief Planner by a significant number continues to bring the most complaints for Be First as they deal with residents directly for both submission of plans but also objections to planning applications.

4.4 We are aware that significant process improvement is required concerning how defects are managed post the 12-month warranty 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 37.5% were answered within timescale. This is a large decrease on the performance of last year, we have addressed this with Be First directly who assure that complaints continue to be a high priority for the service and that resources will be made available to improve moving forward.

## 5. Community Solutions

Stage 1 Complaints Received Community Solutions			
	2020	2021	2022
Customer Contact	55	85	26
Intervention	14	0	0
Support	122	144	111
Triage	12	28	39
Revenue and Benefits	28	276	205
Universal	5	6	3
Work and Skills	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>384</b>



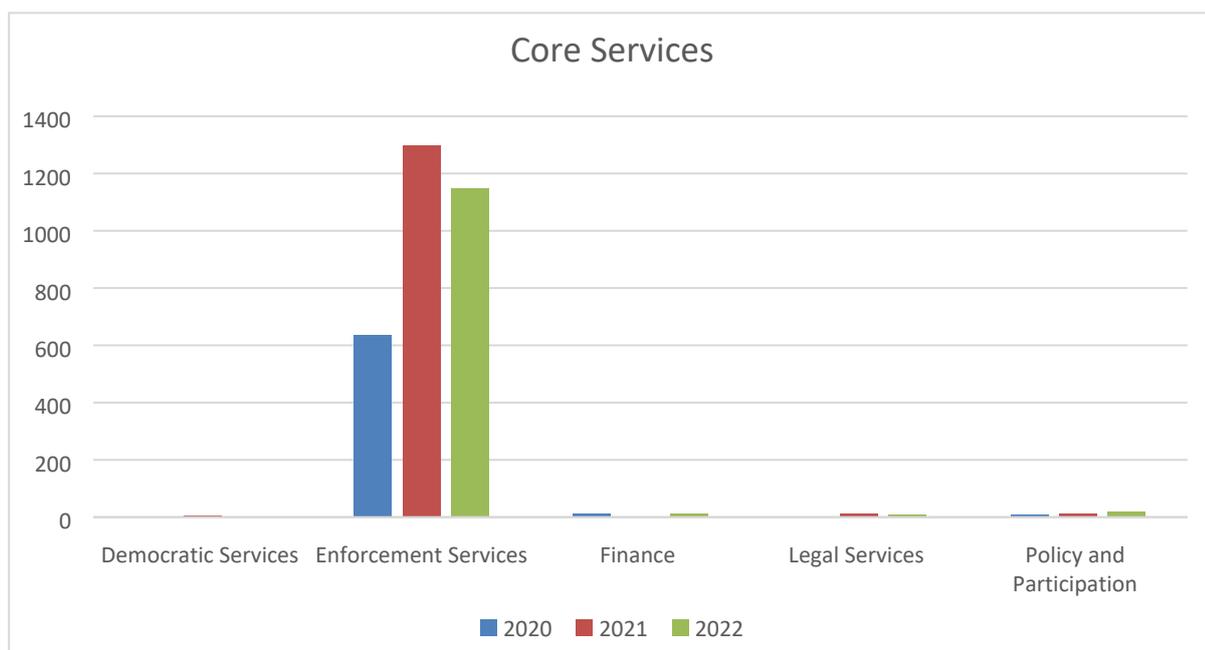
5.1 Community Solutions offers a range of services for our residents including maintaining housing allocations, tenancy sustainment, early intervention services and the Homes and Money Hub which offers valuable advice and support to those residents who require financial assistance.

5.2 Revenues and Benefits are the highest generator for complaints within Community Solutions and this is due to the service being one which affects all our residents and businesses within the Borough. Positively although the highest generator there has still been a decrease in the numbers reported from the previous year. The main crux of the complaints within this area is disagreement with decisions made such as not granting benefit applications made, charges on the account. Complainants will often suggest that they have rung and resolved an issue with an outstanding balance, but the system still generates letters informing of debt or legal action. We are reviewing the volume of communication reducing this where possible. Also adding to our communication QR codes for digital access.

- 5.3 The Support service comprises of several functions for which we deal with complaints these areas being Housing Allocations and Tenancy Sustainment. Housing Allocations is self-explanatory this relates to the wait time for Council Housing and disagreement with decision to place the resident on the housing list. Tenancy Sustainment in 2022 moved the general Anti-Social Behaviour function to Core Services but still will work with our tenants to resolve ongoing presenting issues which can relate to management transfer requests and keeping people in their homes.
- 5.5 Of those complaints received within Community Solutions 74.4% were answered within timescale.

## 6. Core Services

Stage 1 Complaints Received Core Services			
	2020	2021	2022
<b>Democratic Services</b>	0	6	1
<b>Enforcement Services</b>	635	1298	1147
<b>Finance</b>	13	1	11
<b>Legal Services</b>	3	13	10
<b>Policy and Participation</b>	9	11	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>835</b>	<b>1,414</b>	<b>1188</b>



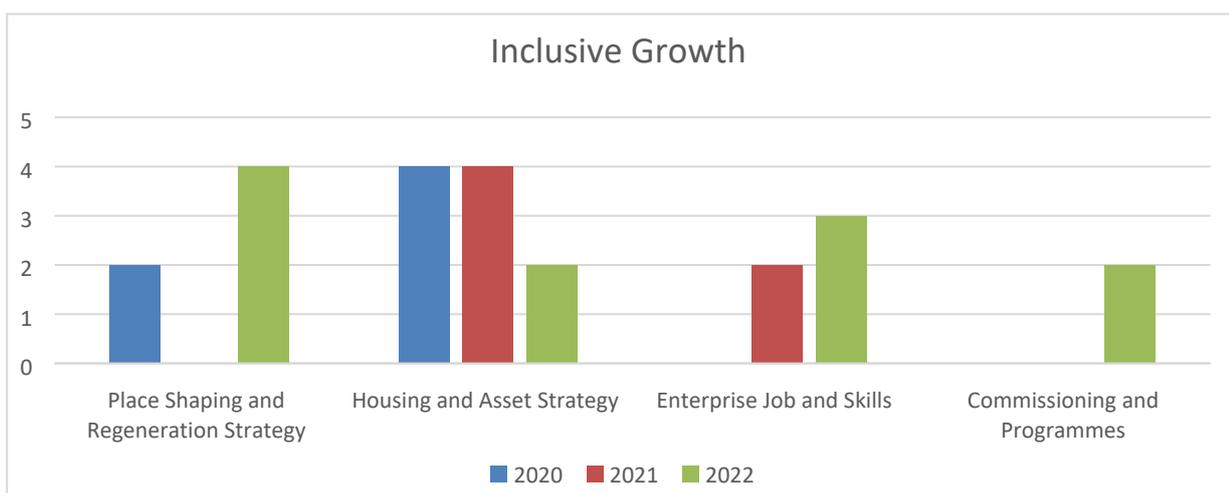
- 6.1 Core Services is a grouping of services which provide several essential services to our residents including parking and street enforcement.
- 6.2 Core Services maintain the contract for our leisure centres and residents are directed to submit complaints about these individual services to the centres directly.
- 6.3 All services in Core report minimal complaints aside from Enforcement Services. Enforcement provides a variety of services to our residents and the nature of those

services will generate high volumes such as Parking and Street Enforcement. This year also Enforcement created a new team and took responsibility for managing complaints relating to Anti -Social Behaviour both in private and public places. In 2022 we are reporting a decrease of 11% on complaints received.

- 6.4 When we take a deeper look at the breakdown of complaints for Enforcement Services it is clear that one particular service generates an unusually large amount, and this is parking with a 73% share of all complaints for this area. In 2022 we implemented a new process for parking complaints as a large amount of people would use the complaints process to circumvent the legislative process which is not the way to deal with Penalty Charge Notices. This we would have hoped to have seen a larger drop in % but this has not been the case. We need to question why despite making changes they are not having the desired effect.
- 6.5 Parking have reviewed their systems and made a decision to implement a phone line for which our residents can call to resolve issues relating to permits and PCN's it is hoped that this move will lower the number of complaints made as there is the facility to speak to specialised parking individual over the phone to ensure first point of resolution.
- 6.5 Of those complaints received in Core Services 57.2% were answered within timescale.

## 7. Inclusive Growth

Stage 1 Complaints Received Inclusive Growth			
	2020	2021	2022
Place Shaping and Regeneration Strategy	2	0	4
Housing and Asset Strategy	4	4	2
Enterprise Job and Skills	0	2	3
Commissioning and Programmes	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>



- 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 45.4% were answered within timescale.

## 8. My Place

Stage 1 Complaints Received My Place			
	2020	2021	2022
Landlord Customer and Commercial	255	367	355
Contracts Quality and Compliance	7	5	1
Asset Management and Capital Delivery	93	91	76
Business Development	2	2	2
Public Realm	859	1130	859
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,216</b>	<b>1,595</b>	<b>1,293</b>



- 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 Reviewing the numbers received 65% of these complaints relate to Public Realm. These particular teams offer services to the Borough as a whole such as refuse collections. There has been a 24% decrease in the complaints received for Public Realm in 2022 and of those complaints received only 2.3% went over the 10-day

timescale. When we assess the numbers received against that level of performance it is showing the determination of this service to improve not only how they deliver their service but how they respond to the concerns raised.

8.4 The Strategic Director for My Place continues to enforce the message of responding to complaints within timescale and not only that but ensuring we are fully answering the concerns which are set out. We only have to consider the performance outcomes for Public Realm to show that this intervention is working.

8.5 Of those complaints received in My Place 95.7% were answered within timescale.

## 9. Reside

Stage 1 Complaints Received Reside			
	2020	2021	2022
<b>Reside</b>	0	0	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>23</b>



9.1 Reside is a housing company owned by the Council and aims to provide affordable rented properties who are in employment but are unable to afford private rent and have limited access to social housing.

9.2 Looking at the complaints received for Reside the most common theme is the repairs which are required to be undertaken in properties. Due to the majority of properties being newly built there is confusion on who is responsible for the repairs to be taken place.

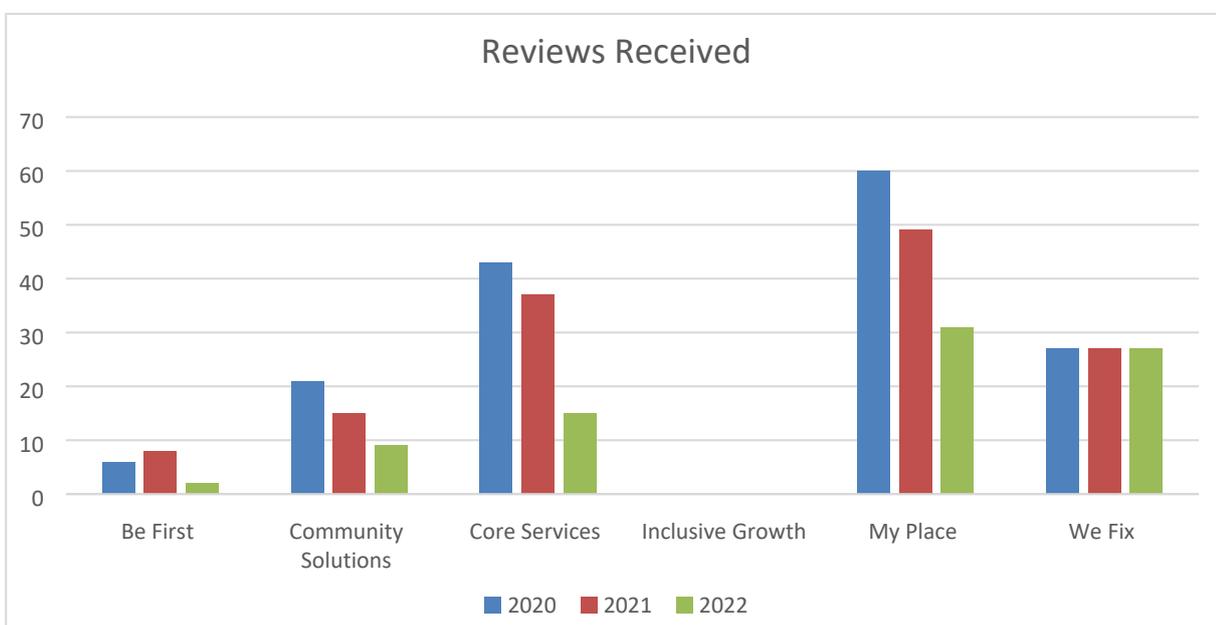
9.3 Of those complaints received in Reside 61% are answered in timescale.

## 10. Reviews (Stage 2)

10.1 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 Customer Feedback Team as an independent service to ensure that a thorough investigation has been provided.

- 10.2 Only 2% of cases were reviewed in 2022, indicating that the Local Authority has provided a satisfactory resolution to the issue reported. Undertaking an overview of the requests which have been received show that reviews were requested as residents felt that the initial responses did not meet expectations in terms of offering clear and deliverable actions. Responses also on occasion 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.
- 10.3 In 2022 we have seen a decrease in the number of reviews by 38% from 2021 the spread across the teams asking for reviews remains static. **The top 3 service areas are repairs (27), parking (11), landlord services (16) meaning that 64% 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	2022
<b>Be First</b>	6	8	2
<b>Community Solutions</b>	21	15	9
<b>Core Services</b>	43	37	15
<b>Inclusive Growth</b>	0	0	0
<b>My Place</b>	60	49	31
<b>We Fix</b>	27	27	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>84</b>



## 11. Local Government Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman

11.1 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/](http://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/london-borough-of-barking-dagenham/annualletters/)

11.2 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.

<b>LGO Detailed Investigations</b>	
Not Upheld	3
Upheld	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>

11.3 We have compared the number of detailed investigations carried out in Boroughs within London who are similar in population size to Barking and Dagenham.

<b>LGO Benchmarking Data – Detailed Investigations</b>	
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	22
London Borough of Camden	25
City of Westminster	27
London Borough of Islington	15

11.4 Housing Ombudsman complaints are reviewed on a financial year basis and a report is produced by the Housing Ombudsman directly. These reports provide information on determinations on the complaints dealt with and are published at the following link [ACPI 2021-22 v2.xlsx \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](#)

11.5 From the cases which were submitted to the HO the table below shows those cases which required detailed investigations.

<b>Housing Ombudsman Determinations</b>	
Maladministration	2
Partial Maladministration	2
Reasonable Redress	1
No Maladministration	1
Outside Jurisdiction	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>

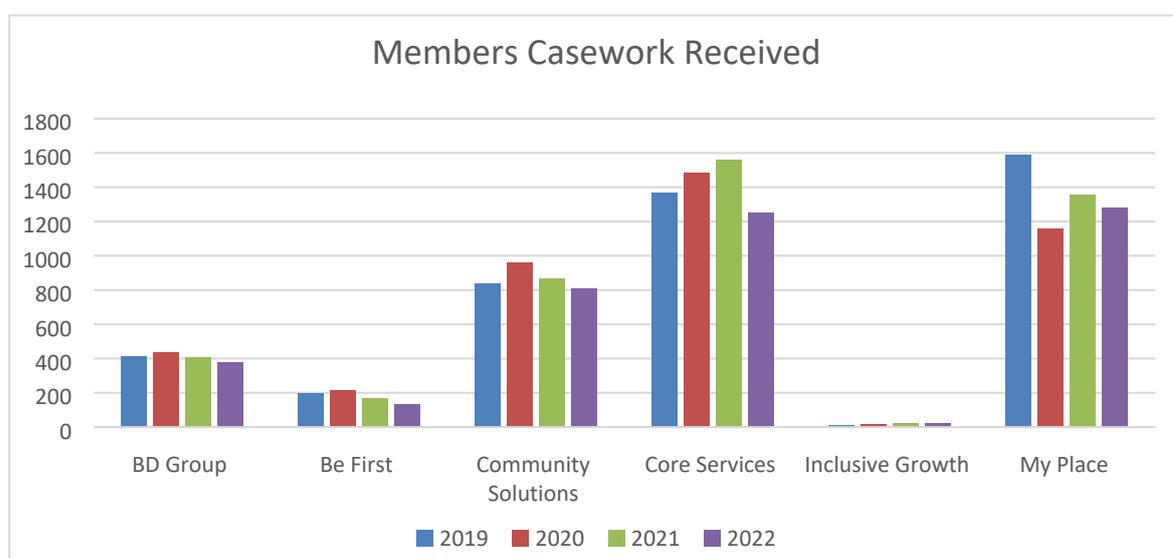
<b>Housing Ombudsman Benchmarking Data – Determinations</b>	
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	8
London Borough of Camden	24
City of Westminster	34
London Borough of Islington	21

## 12. Members Casework

12.1 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.

12.2 A decrease of 11% in casework received is reported within 2022. 80% of casework was answered within timescale. This is below our stated target of 90%.

Members Casework Received			
	2020	2021	2022
<b>BD Group</b>	438	406	379
<b>Be First</b>	214	169	133
<b>Community Solutions</b>	961	865	807
<b>Core Services</b>	1,481	1,559	1,252
<b>Inclusive Growth</b>	15	23	23
<b>My Place</b>	1,158	1,353	1,281
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,267</b>	<b>4,375</b>	<b>3,875</b>



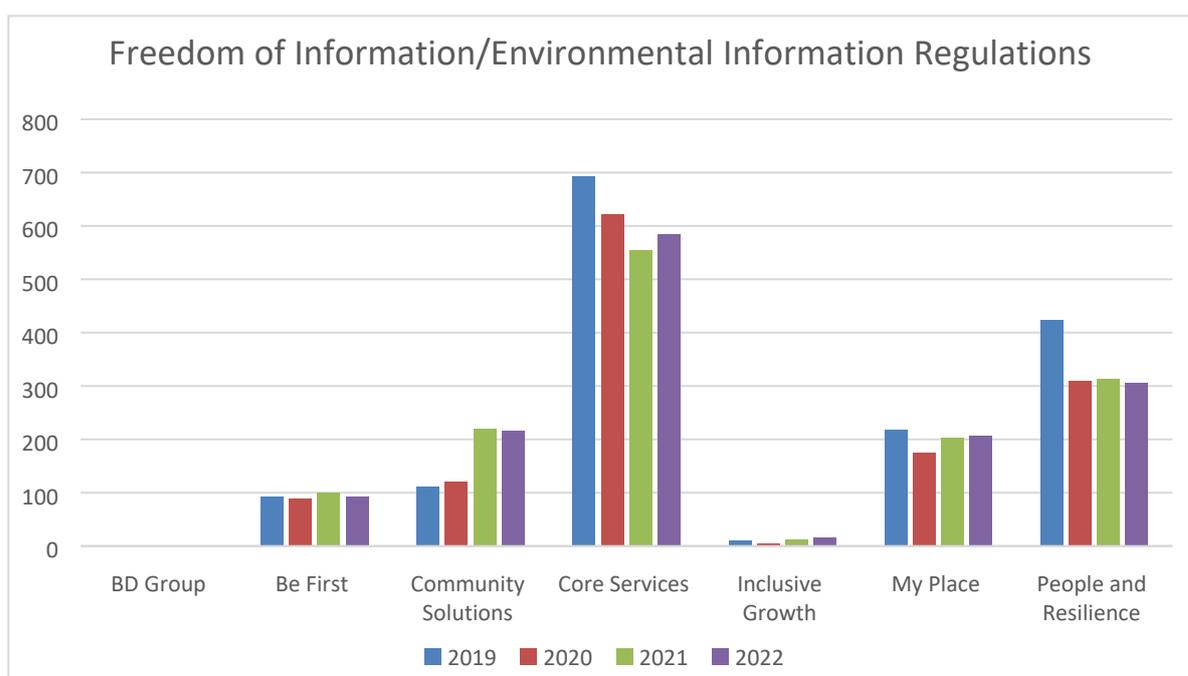
12.3 Member case work, in the main, mirrors that of our complainants who write to us directly aside from the inclusion of housing allocations and the associated wait time for these properties.

12.4 There has been a significant decrease of 19.6% reported for Core Services from 2021. This is impressive considering the services which are covered within this directorate with Enforcement being the largest. This trend down can be in part attributed to increased drive and motivation to ask Councillors to assist by encouraging residents to report issues such as eyesore gardens on our report it digital service. This allows teams to then focus on those more complex cases.

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

### 13. Freedom of Information Requests

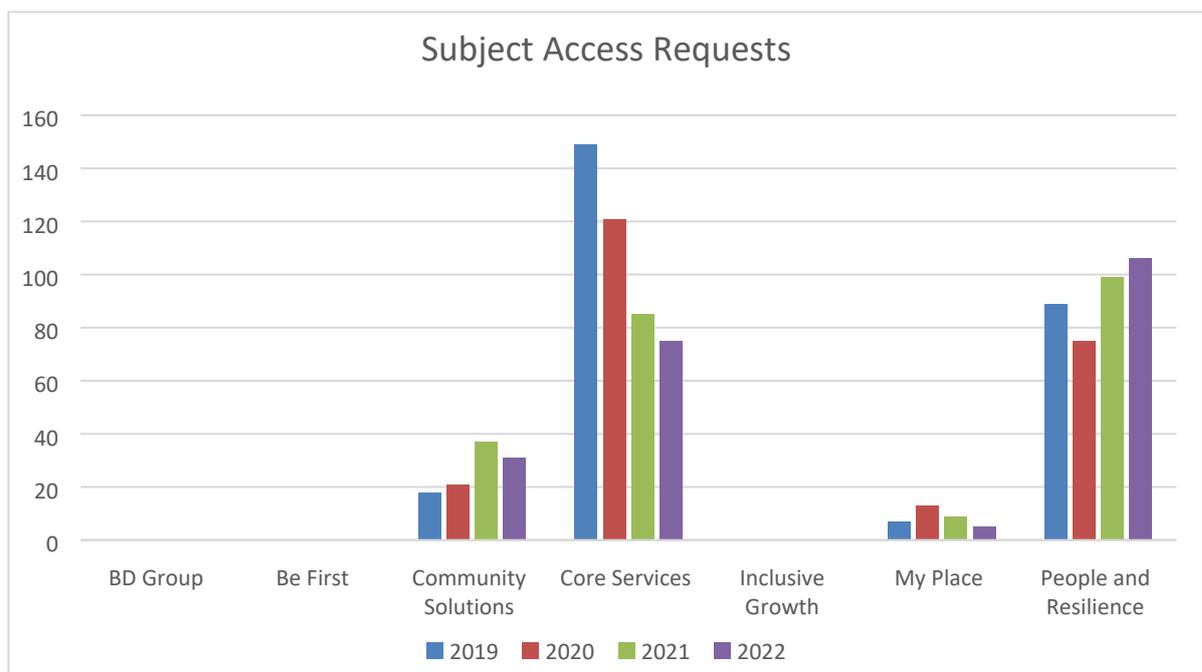
Freedom of Information/EIR Received			
	2020	2021	2022
<b>BDTP</b>	0	0	0
<b>Be First</b>	89	100	93
<b>Community Solutions</b>	121	220	216
<b>Core Services</b>	621	555	585
<b>Inclusive Growth</b>	5	13	15
<b>My Place</b>	174	202	207
<b>People and Resilience</b>	310	313	305
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,320</b>	<b>1,403</b>	<b>1,421</b>



- 13.1 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. The link for the disclosure page is here <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/transparency-and-information-requests/freedom-information>
- 13.2 We have seen a slight increase in FOI's which have been received in 2022 by 1%.
- 13.3 The highest volume of FOI's received continues year on year to be Core Services and People and Resilience receiving 62.6% (890 of 1421). The Commissioning Director Education received the highest volume of enquires with 8% relating to EHC plans, inclusion data and school admissions. Parking received 6% with requests including penalty charge notices issued and parking permits.
- 13.4 Of those FOI and EiR's received 85.2% (1196 of 1403) were completed within timescale.
- 13.5 Improvements in performance have been made in the latter part of the year with these expected to continue into 2023 increasing our overall target in line with guidance set by the Information Commissioners Office.

## 14. Subject Access Requests

	Subject Access Requests Received		
	2020	2021	2022
<b>BD Group</b>	0	0	0
<b>Be First</b>	0	0	0
<b>Community Solutions</b>	21	37	31
<b>Core Services</b>	121	85	75
<b>Inclusive Growth</b>	0	0	0
<b>My Place</b>	13	9	5
<b>People and Resilience</b>	75	99	106
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>217</b>



14.1 This year we have noted a further increase of 7% in the number of cases received within People and Resilience area which covers both Adult and Children Social Care files. Year on year People and Resilience and CCTV receive the largest portion of casework type.

14.2 Of those Subject Access Requests received 74.6% (162 of 217) were completed within timescale. This is a decrease on the previous year circa 14%. We are working with colleagues in Children's Social Care on this matter as these specific files have a large impact on the performance.

## 15. Financial Implications

15.1 None

## 16. Legal Implications

16.1 None

## 17. Other Implications

**17.1** None

**Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report**

- None

**List of appendices:**

- Statutory Social Care Complaints Annual Report
- Housing Ombudsman Updated Self-Assessment