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| <b>Title</b>           | Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report |
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| <b>Presented to</b>    | Council Housing Management Board                           |
| <b>Confidentiality</b> | Not commercially or personally sensitive                   |

## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the Landlords (Cheshire West and Chester council – CW&C) complaints handling process and the annual performance for 2024-25. It details the volume, categories, outcomes of complaints, and performance metrics for this period. Additionally, it outlines analysis conducted on Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints, demographics of complainants, Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) cases, compliance with the Complaint Handling Code 2025, and service improvement initiatives.

This is the advised content required for the annual reporting now stipulated by the HOS, linked to the Housing Ombudsman Code for Complaint Handling. In line with this new code of conduct this report requires formal governance sign off.

Once approved, landlords must publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaint's performance and service improvement report on their website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this, ahead of HOS submission deadline for the self-assessment against the code on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

## Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council Housing Management Board provide a response to this report, ahead of the 30 September 2025 submission deadline which will be included in the annual submission to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

## Key Impacts

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Strategy Reference</b> | Complaints handling and getting the right outcome for the customer is a crucial element and a main priority for ForHousing (FH) and Cheshire West and Chester council (CW&C) and directly links to the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), including satisfaction in how your landlord handles complaints.  |
| <b>Customer Impact</b>    | Through the complaints process, tenants can hold us to account. Complaints and lessons learned enable us to focus on getting things right first time, understanding tenants better and using what they tell us to improve our services. On a quarterly basis, the Complaints Panel will review any trends or themes from complaints and help to audit our processes. A Complaints Summary Report will be presented to the Council Housing Management Board each quarter. The above report will contain performance information against the KPIs for complaints as well as themes and lessons learnt. |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Colleague Impact</b>                        | Feedback from complaints investigations and from listening to tenants helps us to improve services in areas such as repairs and neighbourhoods.  |
| <b>Financial and Resource Implications</b>     | There are no direct financial obligations to this report.  |
| <b>Legal, Regulatory and Risk Implications</b> | <p>The Regulator of Social Housing cannot help to resolve individual customer complaints but can consider whether individual complaints are evidence of systemic failings by the landlord. This is supported by its close working relationship with the HOS, who can refer issues to the Regulator when it finds evidence to suggest individual cases are indicative of wider failings.</p> <p>Effective complaint handling is an important mechanism for tenants to be able to hold their landlord to account when things go wrong. In the Consumer Standards, particularly the “Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard,” it is made clear that landlords must have a clear approach to complaints. This approach should allow for tenants to raise their concerns and, when they do, landlords listen, act promptly and have effective processes for handling the complaint.</p> <p>Due to the widening powers of the HOS, FH/CW&amp;C needs to be aware of the potentially adverse risks to reputation, not only by the number of cases referred to the HOS, either due to reoccurring themes or by the way in which complaints are managed.</p> <p>However, given our desire to remain accountable to our tenants and improve the service delivery to them, FH/CW&amp;C remains open to change and committed to delivering good quality housing services that satisfy both our tenants and the Regulators requirements.</p> |
| <b>EDI Implications</b>                        | To ensure we are compliant with the HOS Complaint Handling Code the current Complaints Policy was reviewed and adopted in June 2025. The review and approval process incorporates engaging with tenants, including Tenant Board Members giving them the opportunity to influence the policy. All staff delivering this policy complete annual equality and diversity training and have awareness of the reasonable adjustments policy.   |

## 1. Background

- 1.1 In conjunction with the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) Complaint Handling Code, our governing body (or equivalent) Council Housing Management Board (CHMB) which is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning receives regular updates on the volume, categories, and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance including compliance with the Ombudsman’s orders. In addition to this, a Complaints Panel has been established that consists of two tenant board members and is chaired by a Councillor all of which are part of the CHMB and has been given delegated powers to review complaint performance and report their findings back to the CHMB.

- 1.2 CW&C complaints process has two stages “Stage 1” and “Stage 2”. Tenants can escalate to the HOS if they feel that the complaints process has been exhausted and they remain dissatisfied.
- 1.3 Tenants can report complaints through a variety of channels including CW&C and FH’s websites, via the ForHousing Customer Connect Hub and directly to FH colleagues.

## 2. Complaints Performance 2024-2025

The table below sets out performance in the complaint handling from April 2024 to March 2025.

| Measure   | 2022-23      | 2023-24 | 2024-25 | Variance on previous year |
|---|--------------|---------|---------|---------------------------|
| <b>Stage 1</b><br>Number of complaints received                 | 259          | 492     | 509     | 3% increase               |
| <b>Stage 1</b><br>Number withdrawn or not accepted as complaint | Not recorded | 35      | 49      |                           |
| <b>Stage 1</b><br>Number responded to                           | 177          | 457     | 460     | 0.6% increase             |
| <b>Stage 1</b><br>Responded to in line with the Ombudsman code  | 71%          | 36%     | 47%     |                           |
| <b>Stage 2</b><br>Number received and responded to              | 6            | 29      | 61      | 110% increase             |
| <b>Stage 2</b><br>Responded to in line with the Ombudsman code  | 67%          | 66%     | 90%     |                           |

### 2.1 Stage 1 Analysis

- 2.1.1 The volume of complaints received has more than doubled over the last two years from 259 to 509. This increase is due to improved recording of complaints, as well as increased customer awareness of the complaints process as a way of seeking resolution encouraged by wider external communications from both internal and external sources encouraging complaints. For example, in [YOUR area Newsletter Spring/Summer 2025](#) we promoted and shared how to make a complaint.
- 2.1.2 Stage 1 complaints have been analysed in greater detail to determine the service area and the theme of the complaint. During 2024-25 there were 460 complaints investigated. On average, we received 9 complaints per week which required a full investigation.
- 2.1.3 **Appendix 1** shows the breakdown of Stage 1 complaints by the service area and the theme of the complaint.
- 2.1.4 The majority of Stage 1 complaints related to the Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) services, making up around 78% of all reported issues. This aligns with an observed increase in repair work, with the number of responsive repairs undertaken rising again this year by approximately 14%, from 15,859 in 2023-24 to 18,221 in 2024-25, compared to an 11% increase from 14,127 in 2022/23 to 15,859 in 2023/24.
- 2.1.5 Neighbourhoods comprised the second most complained about service (8%), with Gas at 6%

2.1.6 The top three themes of dissatisfaction for all service areas were Lack of Action (28% (127/460), communication (13% (61/460) and damage (10% (52/460).

2.1.7 Following investigation at Stage 1, the outcome of the complaints was as follows.

| Outcome    | Number and % of Cases 2024-25 |
|------------|-------------------------------|
| Upheld     | 347 (77%)                     |
| Not Upheld | 106 (23%)                     |

2.1.7 Further analysis has shown that we have 48 households that have made more than 1 complaint, covering a variety of themes, during 2024-25.

## 2.2 Stage 2 Analysis

2.2.1 During 2024-25, CW&C received 61 Stage 2 complaints (an escalation rate of 13%) compared to 2023-24 when 29 were received (an escalation rate of 6%).

2.2.2 **Appendix 2** shows the service and theme of the Stage 2 complaints.

2.2.3 Similar to Stage 1, the highest number of Stage 2 complaints relates to the Repairs and Maintenance service with 87% complaints relating to this service.

2.2.4 The outcome of the Stage 2 complaints following investigation were:

| Outcome    | Number and % of Cases 2024-25 |
|------------|-------------------------------|
| Upheld     | 48 (79%)                      |
| Not Upheld | 13 (21%)                      |

2.2.5 Further analysis has shown that 2 households have escalated more than 1 complaint to stage 2 in 2024-25, both relating to responsive repairs.

## 3. **Insight**

3.1 The profile of customers raising a complaint has been cross referenced against the overall data we hold for our customers. **Appendix 3** highlights the 6 protected characteristics for which we record data and the profile of the complainant at Stage 1 and 2.

3.2 The profile of customers raising a complaint generally mirrors CW&C'S overall tenant base. Data indicates that the complaints process is accessible to tenants with disabilities, although complaints from disabled customers compared to the overall customer base is lower. The data also reveals we have received a higher proportion of stage 1 complaints from those aged between 35 and 44 compared to the HMC overall population, with a lower proportion from those aged over 65, and female customers are overrepresented.

3.3 Moving forward in 2025-26 we will review and report to the Council Housing Management Board each quarter the demographics of residents raising a complaint relative to the overall customer base. In addition, we will also record, monitor, and report on any reasonable adjustments that have been taken to deliver the complaint resolution. The above is in addition to the Complaint Panel reviewing a sample of complaints of their choosing so that the Panel can hold officers to account and determine what action if any is required to address

any themes and where a service failure has taken place changes to appropriate policies/service delivery is realised.

#### **4. Housing Ombudsman Cases**

- 4.1 Tenants can escalate their case to the HOS if they have exhausted the complaints and they remain dissatisfied. During 2024-25 one case was investigated by the HOS and the Ombudsman determined that in accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was Maladministration by the landlord in its handling of repairs for damp and mould, and a service failure by the landlord in its handling of the associated complaint. All the HOS orders and recommendations were complied with within the 4-week timescales.
- 4.2 At the end of March 2025, CW&C had been notified that 9 cases were currently under review or investigation with the HOS.
- 4.3 The Housing Ombudsman publishes an annual report for landlords where they have determined five or more cases in the year. The Housing Ombudsman has only considered one case for CW&C between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, so a report is not available.
- 4.4 There were no relevant publications produced by the Housing Ombudsman regarding CW&C in 2024-25 and no failure orders.

#### **5. Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024**

- 5.1 The Housing Ombudsman introduced the Complaint Handling Code in July 2020, updated in April 2022 and again recently in April 2024.
- 5.2 Alongside this annual complaints performance and service improvement report, which must include qualitative and quantitative analysis and the types of complaints that we have refused to accept, we are also obliged to:
  - a) complete an annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure our complaint handling remains in line with the Code requirements.
  - b) detail any findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Ombudsman.
  - c) include any annual report about our performance from the Ombudsman); and
  - d) include any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to CW&C.
- 5.3 A review of our self-assessment against the complaints handling code is included in a separate document. We are compliant with the code although there are areas where we need to improve and get better. We need to consistently meet the timescales for responding to stage 1 and stage 2 complaints and this will be a focus for the coming year. Our aim is to achieve 100% compliance in meeting both stage 1 and stage 2 service levels.
- 5.4 The self-assessment against the Code is required to be published by 30 September 2025.

## 6. Service Improvements

- 6.1 Our aim is to encourage a positive complaint handling culture, to ensure we actively utilise complaint learning and implement service improvements. We want to be accountable and transparent to our customers.
- 6.2 Each time a formal complaint is received and investigated, as part of the response we proactively look to identify lessons learned and service improvements to prevent similar complaints happening again. **Appendix 4** contains some real examples of service improvements identified in 2024-25 as a direct result of complaints learning.
- 6.3 *Ensuring compliance through the Complaints Panel*
- This new panel has been operational since April 2023 and is made up of Tenant Board Members and chaired by one of the councillors on the Council Housing Management Board (CHMB). In addition to the above, officers from both CW&C and FH attend with the Panel reviewing a selected sample of closed and current cases on a quarterly basis. This enhances the oversight, consistency, and responsiveness to complaints and their approach and recommendations for improvements with the chair of the Complaints Panel providing an update to the Council Management Housing Board. During 2024/25, this included the recommendation for specific complaint KPIs for complaint handling.
- 6.4 *Independent scrutiny and oversight of complaints*
- The Complaints Panel and the reporting their findings back to the CHMB provides assurance of compliance with the Housing Ombudsman code of conduct, identified any learning and provided recommendations for future handling and management of complaints.
- 6.5 These service improvements demonstrate commitment to addressing resident feedback, enhancing operational efficiency, and delivering high-quality services. By leveraging data analysis, resident feedback, and strategic objectives, we aim to continuously improve and exceed expectations.

## 7. Summary

- 7.1 In conclusion, the analysis of complaints data for 2024-25 highlights several key insights and areas for improvement within the complaint handling processes. The significant increase in the volume of complaints, particularly regarding the Repairs and Maintenance service, underpins the importance of addressing underlying issues, gathering insight, and predicting demand.
- 7.2 Data shows delays in responding to complaints at both stage 1 and stage 2. We have made this an improvement focus for 2025-26.
- 7.3 Notably, the analysis of resident demographics reveals patterns in complaint reporting that mirror the overall resident base, indicating accessibility of the complaints process across different groups. However, discrepancies in levels among certain demographics, such as females and specific age categories, suggest the need for monitoring and targeted investigation.

- 7.4 The escalation of complaints to Stage 2 and the subsequent outcomes emphasises the importance of effective resolution at earlier stages to mitigate further dissatisfaction and potential escalation to HOS.
- 7.5 The outlined service improvements demonstrate our proactive approach to addressing identified issues and enhancing complaint handling processes. We aim to foster a culture of accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.

## **8. Next Steps**

- 8.1 We acknowledge the ongoing challenges including increasing service expectations, growing complexity of property maintenance requirements, and evolving regulatory standards. These challenges reinforce the importance of being able to adapt and improve our complaint handling capabilities and our challenges and focus for 2025-26 is to
- maintain low maladministration rates
  - achieve 100% for complaint handling response times through the allocation of additional staff resources.
  - improve the recording of reasonable adjustments
  - strengthen our ability to identify patterns, predict emerging issues, and implement preventative measures.
- 8.2 Moving forward, regular monitoring of complaints data and resident demographics will enable us to identify trends, track progress, and inform strategic decision-making. By aligning with the requirements of the HOS Complaint Handling Code and prioritising resident feedback will strengthen the complaints handling procedures and uphold our commitment to delivering high-quality services.
- 8.3 To ensure The Council Housing Management Board has sight and assurance throughout the year of complaints performance, a new quarterly performance report has been developed aligned to the content of this report. This will ensure performance information meets the requirements of the HOS.
- 8.4 Following the Boards review of this report and the HO Code of Conduct self-assessment both documents will be submitted to the HOS. The final versions will then be shared with colleagues and residents - via the complaint's webpage.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 Annual Complaints Performance Report Stage 1
- Appendix 2 Annual Complaints Performance Report Stage 2
- Appendix 3 Annual Complaints Performance Report – Insight Data
- Appendix 4 Actions taken to put things right 2024-2025

**Table 1: Stage 1 Complaints received in year by Service Area and Theme**

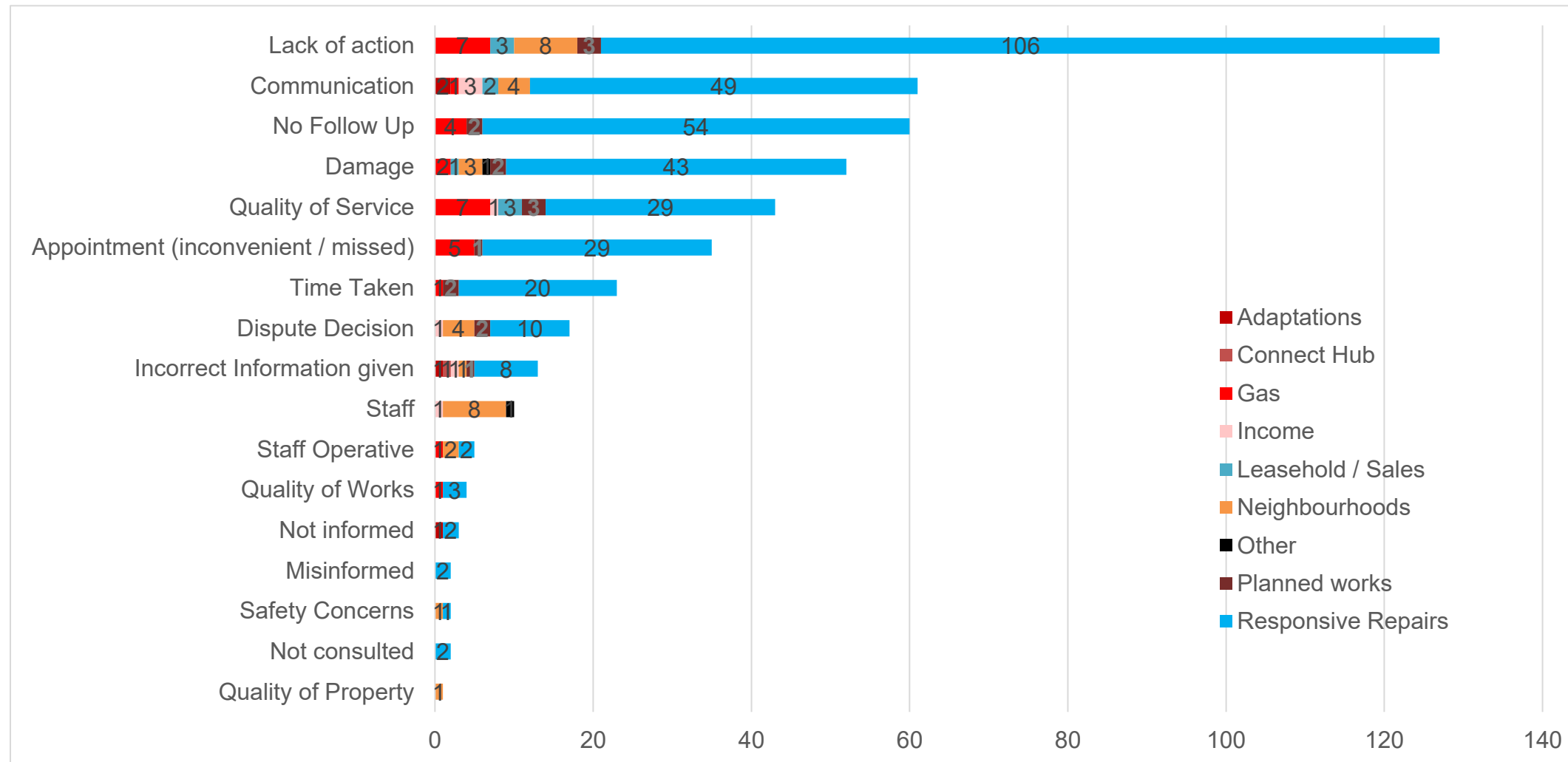
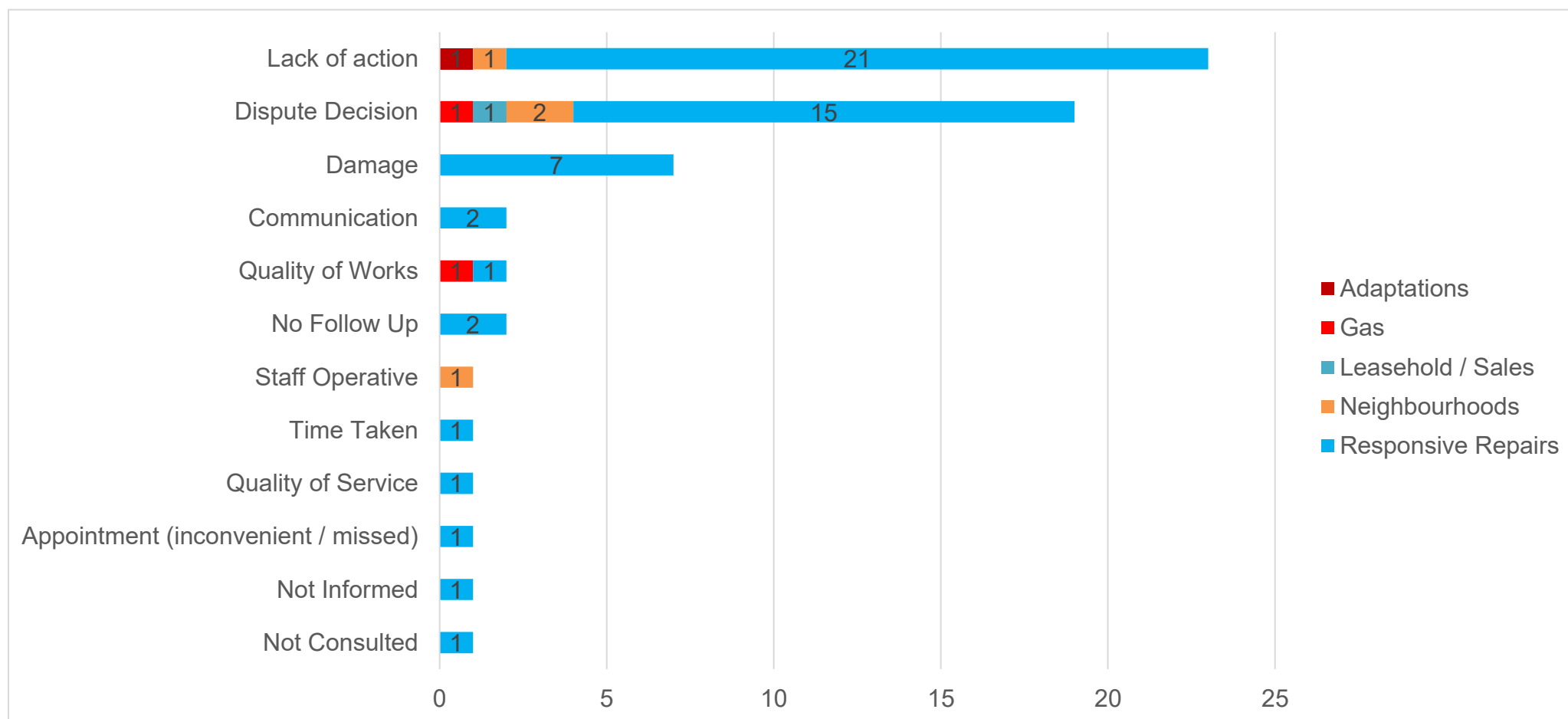


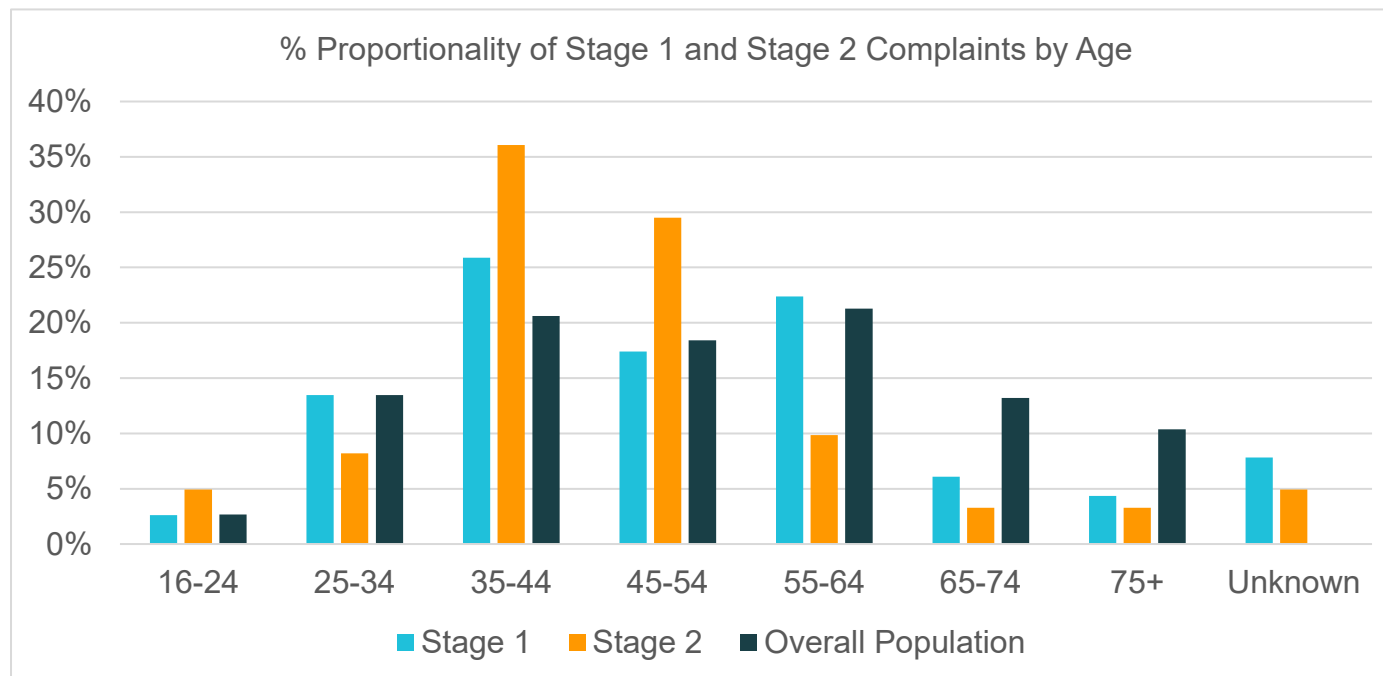


Table 2: Stage 2 Complaints received in year by Service Area and Theme



### Age:

We have received a higher proportion of complaints from those aged between 35 and 44 compared to the HMC overall population, with a lower proportion from those aged over 65.

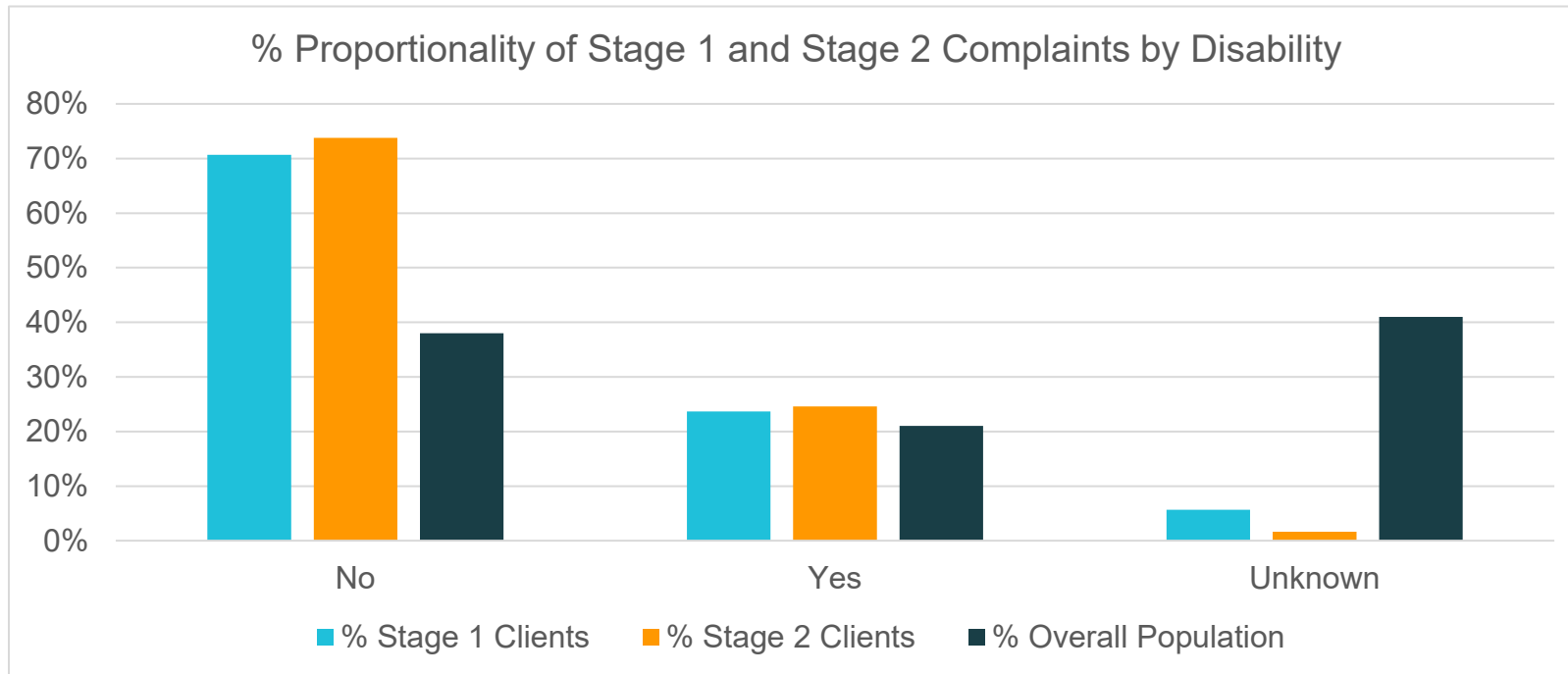


| Age band | % Stage 1 Clients | % Stage 2 Clients | % Overall Population |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 16-24    | 3%                | 5%                | 3%                   |
| 25-34    | 13%               | 8%                | 13%                  |
| 35-44    | 26%               | 36%               | 21%                  |
| 45-54    | 17%               | 30%               | 18%                  |
| 55-64    | 22%               | 10%               | 21%                  |
| 65-74    | 6%                | 3%                | 13%                  |
| 75+      | 4%                | 3%                | 10%                  |
| Unknown* | 8%                | 5%                | 0%                   |

\* Note – the Unknown values against Stage 1 and Stage 2 are complaints from persons who are not tenants, such as owner occupiers who live next door to a Cheshire West and Chester owned property, a leaseholder who has sublet.

## Diversity:

Where a tenant has made a Complaint that is comparable to the proportion with known disabilities.



| Disability | % Stage 1 Clients | % Stage 2 Clients | % Overall Population |
|------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| No         | 71%               | 74%               | 38%                  |
| Yes        | 24%               | 25%               | 21%                  |
| Unknown    | 6%                | 2%                | 41%                  |

**Ethnic Origin:**

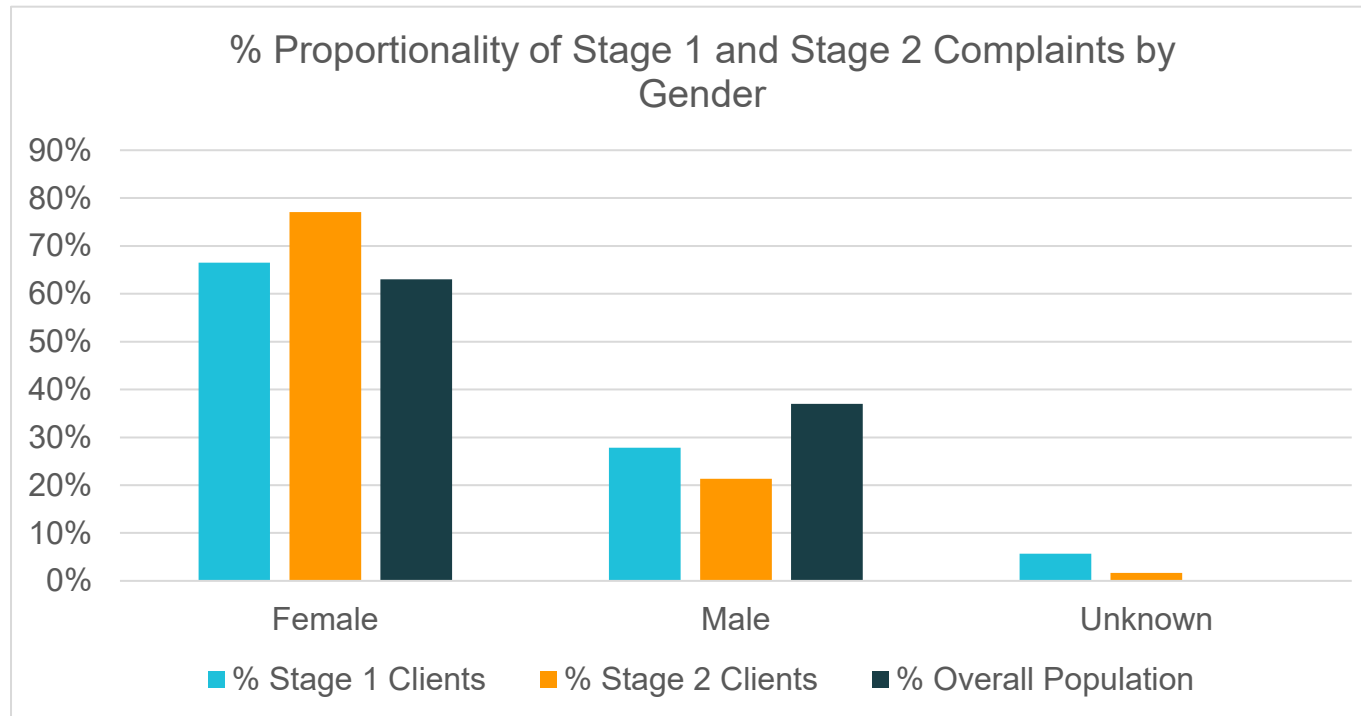
On a broad level the proportion of Complaints where Ethnic Origin is known is comparable to the overall population.



| Ethnic Origin                  | % Stage 1 Clients | % Stage 2 Clients | % Overall Population |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| White (British)                | 77%               | 79%               | 85.21%               |
| Unknown                        | 17%               | 16%               | 9.48%                |
| Prefer Not to Say              | 2%                | 2%                | 0.52%                |
| Any Other White Background     | 3%                | 2%                | 2.31%                |
| Mixed White and Black Caribbea | 1%                | 2%                | 0.23%                |
| Mixed(White and Black African) | 1%                |                   | 0.13%                |
| Any other Asian/Asian British  |                   |                   | 0.16%                |
| Any other Black/Black British  |                   |                   | 0.08%                |
| Arabic                         |                   |                   | 0.16%                |
| Asian/Asian British (Banglades |                   |                   | 0.03%                |
| Asian/Asian British (Chinese)  |                   |                   | 0.03%                |
| Asian/Asian British (Indian)   |                   |                   | 0.02%                |
| Black/Black British (African)  |                   |                   | 0.24%                |
| Black/Black British (Caribbean |                   |                   | 0.02%                |
| Gypsy or Irish Traveller       |                   |                   | 0.08%                |
| Mixed (White and Asian)        |                   |                   | 0.13%                |
| Other                          |                   |                   | 0.37%                |
| Other mixed or multiple backgr |                   |                   | 0.15%                |
| White (Irish)                  |                   |                   | 0.65%                |

## Gender:

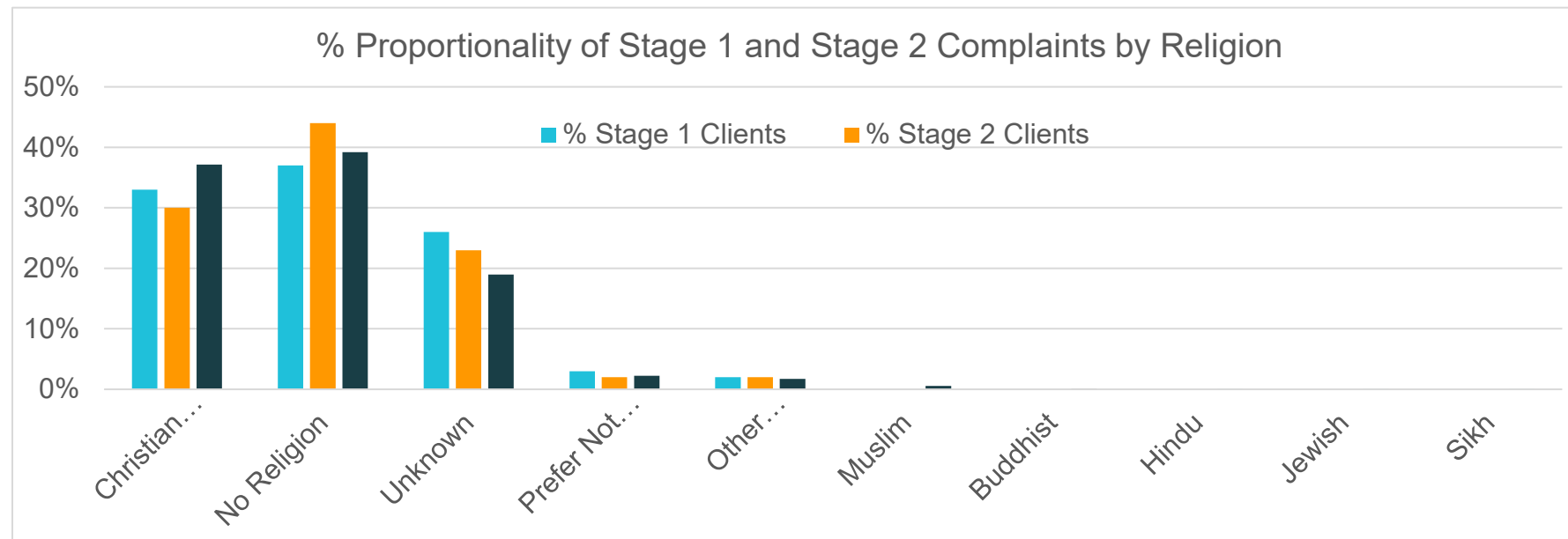
We have received a higher proportion of Complaints from Female's compared the overall population.



| Gender                 | % Stage 1 Clients | % Stage 2 Clients | % Overall Population |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Female                 | 67%               | 77%               | 63%                  |
| Male                   | 28%               | 21%               | 37%                  |
| Other / Gender Neutral | 0%                |                   | 0%                   |
| Unknown                | 6%                | 2%                | 0%                   |

## Religion:

Fluctuations in the proportions between known and unknown Religions.

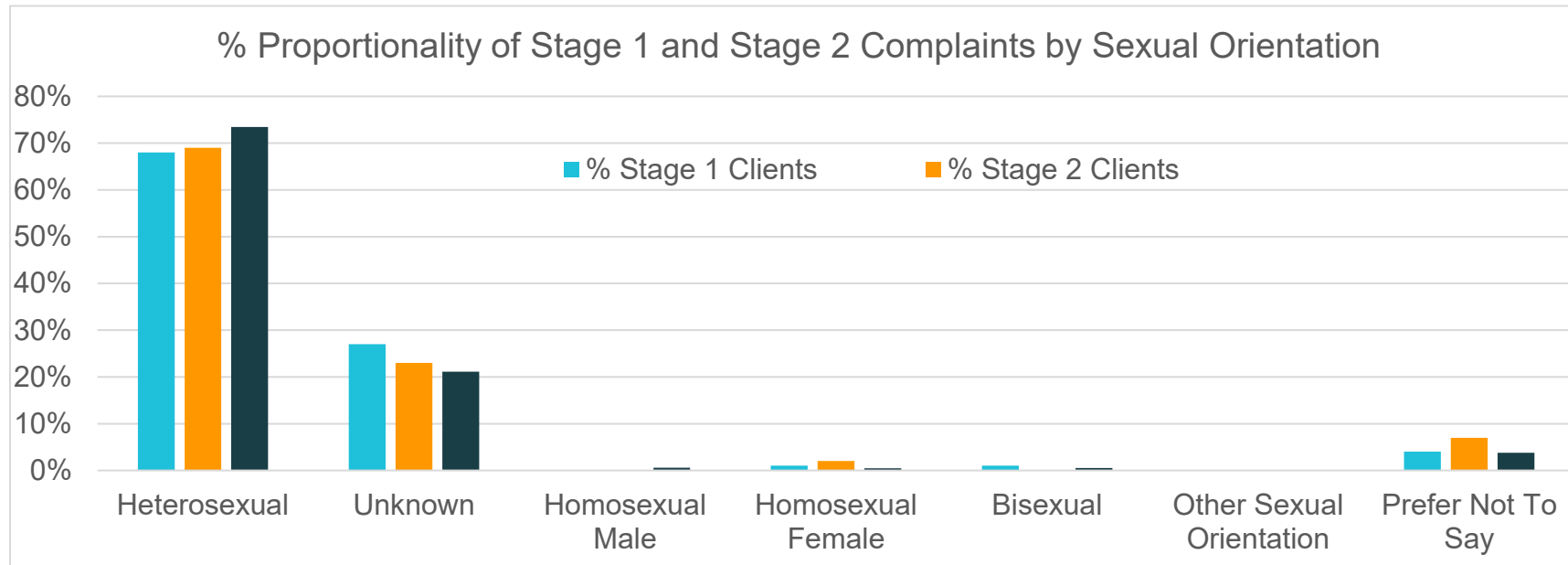


| Religion or belief            | % Stage 1 Clients | % Stage 2 Clients | % Overall Population |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Christian (All Denominations) | 33%               | 30%               | 37%                  |
| No Religion                   | 37%               | 44%               | 39%                  |
| Unknown                       | 26%               | 23%               | 19%                  |
| Prefer Not to Say             | 3%                | 2%                | 2%                   |
| Other Religion                | 2%                | 2%                | 2%                   |
| Muslim                        |                   |                   | 1%                   |
| Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh |                   |                   | 0%                   |




## Sexual Orientation:


Slightly lower proportion of Complaints from those identifying as heterosexual, with a slightly higher proportion of those with an unknown response.



| Sexual Orientation       | % Stage 1 Clients | % Stage 2 Clients | % Overall Population |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Heterosexual             | 68%               | 69%               | 73%                  |
| Unknown                  | 27%               | 23%               | 21%                  |
| Homosexual Male          |                   |                   | 1%                   |
| Homosexual Female        | 1%                | 2%                | 0%                   |
| Bisexual                 | 1%                | 0%                | 1%                   |
| Other Sexual Orientation |                   |                   | 0%                   |
| Prefer Not to Say        | 4%                | 7%                | 4%                   |

**Actions taken to put things right or how we do things differently because of resident feedback. April 2024 – March 2025:**

| Service Area       | What you told us  | What we did   |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Responsive Repairs | We left deep holes in your grass when we used ladders to carry out a high-level repair.   | We now use rubber ladder bases which prevent ladders from sinking into soft ground and causing damage.  |
| Responsive Repairs | Work on your home was delayed as we did not arrange for an asbestos test which was required before the job could begin.   | We have improved the process for arranging and managing asbestos tests, so these are arranged in a timely manner. We have taken on an in-house Asbestos Surveyor who can respond quickly to requests for asbestos tests to avoid work being held up.  |
| Responsive Repairs | You were unclear of what damp works were being carried out in your home when you received the confirmation of work.   | <p>We created a 'glossary of damp works to explain what is involved in common damp repairs which is shared when we let you know if the damp works have been approved.</p>  <p>Damp and Mould Works _What to expect</p> |
| Responsive Repairs | The installation of your extractor fan was delayed as the window glass did not have a hole for the fan, and this had to be arranged before the fan could be fitted. | Where an extractor fan can be installed in a window, we now order a replacement double glazing unit with a hole already cut in it. This removes the need for the glass to be cut in situ and means the installation of the fan can be completed quicker.  |
| New Tenancy        | You were unhappy as damp and mould became a problem shortly after you moved into your new home and this should have been resolved when the property was empty.      | We now look for potential damp and mould issues during the void inspection and will rectify these before the property is relet.   |
| Gas                | We failed to meet your gas appointment, and you were not kept informed.   | We reviewed the process with our contractor and introduced additional monitoring. The supervisor can now track appointments carried out,  |

| Service Area        | What you told us   | What we did   |
|---------------------|--|---|
|                     |  | and where an engineer cannot complete an appointment, it can be quickly re-assigned and completed.  |
| Gas                 | We were unable to repair your boiler, as the part required needed to be ordered and we needed to return another day, causing a delay.          | We have improved the process so that where a part is required, the engineer will contact the planner so that the part can be ordered immediately. An appointment is also arranged for the part to be fitted and agreed with you before the engineer leaves. |
| Planned major works | You didn't fully understand how your home and the facilities would be affected on a day-to-day basis during the works and how best to prepare. | <p>We developed a suite of 'What happens when' leaflets for major works such as kitchen and bathroom installations. Example attached.</p>  <p>WHW_Bathroom.pdf</p>       |