

Cheshire West & Chester Council

Annual Complaints and Performance Insight Report

Council Housing Management Service 2025-26



Cheshire West
and Chester



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Title	Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report
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Presented to	Council Housing Management Board
Confidentiality	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 2025-26. 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 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 30th September 2026.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council Housing Management Board provide a response to this report, ahead of the 30 September 2026 submission deadline which will be included in the annual submission to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Key Impacts

Strategy Reference	Complaints handling and getting the right outcome for the customer is a crucial element and a main priority for Cheshire West and Chester council (CW&C) and directly links to the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), including satisfaction in how your landlord handles complaints.
Customer Impact	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.
Colleague Impact	Feedback from complaints investigations and from listening to tenants helps us to improve services in areas such as repairs and neighbourhoods.
Financial and Resource Implications	There are no direct financial obligations to this report.

Legal, Regulatory and Risk Implications	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. 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. Due to the widening powers of the HOS, CW&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. However, given our desire to remain accountable to our tenants and improve the service delivery to them, CW&C remains open to change and committed to delivering good quality housing services that satisfy both our tenants and the Regulator’s requirements.
EDI Implications	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 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 website, the tenant app, the CW&C Contact Centre, via post and directly to CW&C colleagues.

2. Complaints Performance 2025-2026

The table below sets out performance in the complaint handling from April 2025 to March 2026.

Measure	2024-25	2025-26	Compared to last year
Stage 1 Number of complaints received	509	554	8.8% increase
Stage 1 Number withdrawn or not accepted as complaint	49	18	63.3% decrease
Stage 1 Number responded to	460	536	16.5% increase
Stage 1 Responded to in line with the HO code	47%	99.25%	
Stage 2 Number received and responded to	61	159	160.7% increase
Stage 2 Responded to in line with the HO code	90%	96.86%	

2.1 Stage 1 Analysis

2.1.1 Stage 1 complaint volumes have increased by 8.8% compared to last year. **18** stage 1 complaints were withdrawn or not accepted as a complaint, which is 31 (63.3%) less than last year.

2.1.2 Stage 1 complaints have been analysed in greater detail to determine the service area and the theme of the complaint. During 2025-26 there were **536** stage 1 complaints investigated. On average, we received 10 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 74% of all reported issues.

2.1.5 Neighbourhoods comprised the second most complained about service (10%), with Gas at 8%

2.1.6 The top three themes of dissatisfaction for all service areas were Lack of Action (23% (125/536), communication (14% (75/536) and quality of service (12% (65/536).

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

Outcome	Number and % of Cases 2025-26
Upheld	369 (68.84%)
Not Upheld	167 (31.16%)

2.1.7 Further analysis has shown that we have 61 households that have made more than 1 complaint, covering a variety of themes, during 2025-26.

2.2 Stage 2 Analysis

2.2.1 Stage 2 complaint volumes have increased by 63.3% compared to last year. **159** Stage 2 complaints, representing an escalation rate of 30%, compared to 2024-25 when 61 Stage 2 complaints were received, representing an escalation rate of 13%.

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 2025-26
Upheld	76 (48%)
Not Upheld	83 (52%)

2.2.5 Further analysis has shown that 8 households have escalated more than 1 complaint to stage 2 in 2025-26, majority 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 complaints generally mirrors CW&C's overall tenant base. Whilst no significant disparities have been identified, complaints are proportionately higher amongst customers aged 25-44 and lower amongst those aged 65 and over. Female customers are represented in line with the overall population, whilst male customers are underrepresented. Higher levels of unknown equality data, particularly in relation to ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation and age, limit detailed comparison; however, the data indicates that the complaints process remains accessible to all customer groups.

4. Housing Ombudsman Cases

4.1 Residents can escalate their case to the HOS if they have exhausted the complaints and they remain dissatisfied. During 2025-26 three cases were investigated by the HOS. The findings in from **3** Housing Ombudsman investigations are summarised in the table below. In each case, all orders and recommendations issued by the Ombudsman were completed within the required four-week timescale.

Category	Severe Maladministration	Maladministration	Service failure	Withdrawn	Total
Responsive Repairs – leaks/damp/mould	1	1	0	0	2
Complaint handling	0	1	2	0	3
Anti-Social behaviour	0	1	0	0	1
Noise transfer	0	1	0	0	1
Total	1	4	2	0	7

- 4.2 At the end of March 2026, CW&C had been notified that 17 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 findings in the year. The Housing Ombudsman has considered three cases for CW&C between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, which resulted in 7 findings.
- 4.4 There were no relevant publications produced by the Housing Ombudsman regarding CW&C in 2025-26 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 in April 2024.
- 5.2 Alongside this annual complaint's 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. While we continue to learn from complaints, our focus must be on translating that learning into lasting improvement. By taking a strategic approach and embedding lessons learned into everyday practice, we can reduce repeat failures and strengthen service delivery over time.
- 5.4 The self-assessment against the Code is required to be published by 30 September 2026.

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 residents.
- 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 2025-26 as a direct result of complaints learning.
- 6.3 Before closing a complaint, we speak directly with the complainant to ensure they are happy that the issues raised have been fully resolved. Once agreed, we confirm the outcome and complaint closure in writing.

- 6.4 All complaints are triaged on receipt to ensure we understand the customer's circumstances and the impact the issue has had on the household. This helps us identify any support needs at an early stage and respond appropriately. In addition, our Stage 1 acknowledgement and response letters now include a request for customers to inform us of any reasonable adjustments they may require, enabling us to deliver a more accessible and inclusive complaints service.
- 6.5 Ensuring compliance through the *Complaints Panel*
- This 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, service area managers as and when required. A quarterly report is provided and a selected sample of closed and current cases as well as any cases that have had determinations from the Housing Ombudsman. 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 CHMB.
- 6.6 *Independent scrutiny and oversight of complaints*
- The Complaints Panel and the reporting of their findings back to the CHMB provides assurance of compliance with the Housing Ombudsman code of conduct, identifies any learning and provides recommendations for future handling and management of complaints.
- 6.7 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 2025-26 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 minimal delays in responding to complaints at both stage 1 and stage 2, but we recognise improvement could still be made. We have made this an improvement focus for 2026-27.
- 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 males 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 2026-27:
- We will focus on strengthening our approach to organisational learning. As part of this, we are becoming a member of HouseMark to benchmark our performance against our peers, identify and share best practice, and make better use of the Housing Ombudsman's Centre for Learning. Together, these approaches will help us embed learning, improve performance, and reduce the risk of repeat failures.
 - Strengthen how we learn from complaints by taking a more strategic approach to embedding learning into our processes, ensuring insights are translated into lasting improvements that enhance service delivery and prevent repeat failures.
 - Maintain the high percentage for complaint handling response times through the management of complaints.
 - Improve the recording of reasonable adjustments
 - Strengthen our ability to identify patterns, predict emerging issues, and implement preventative measures.
 - Minimise “upheld” Stage 2 complaints through robust stage 1 complaint investigations, effective resolution at Stage 1, and enhanced quality assurance processes.
- 8.2 To ensure Member Responsible for Complaints and 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 council's webpages.
- 8.5 Carry out transactional surveys for complaint handling

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 2025-2026

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

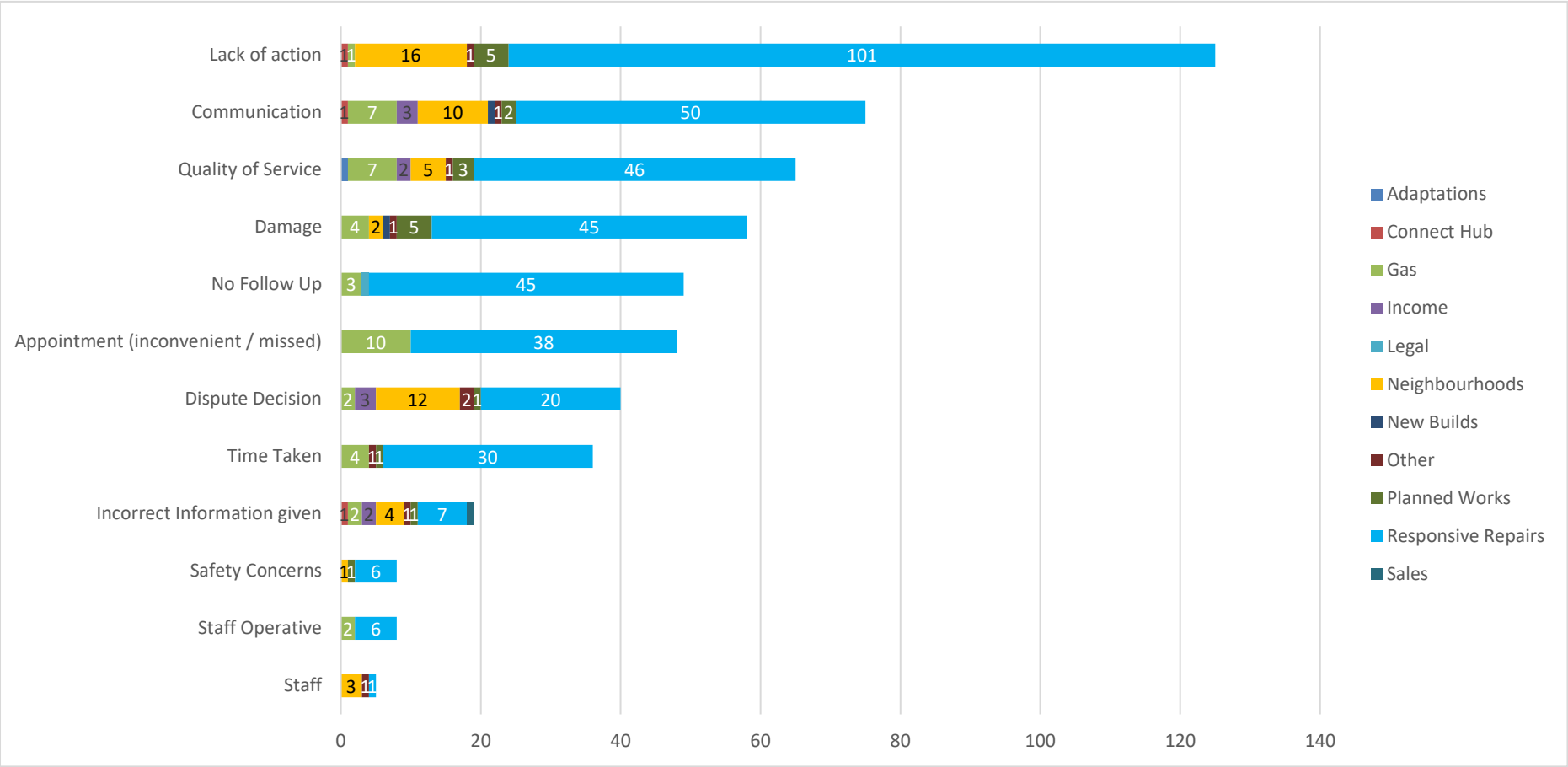
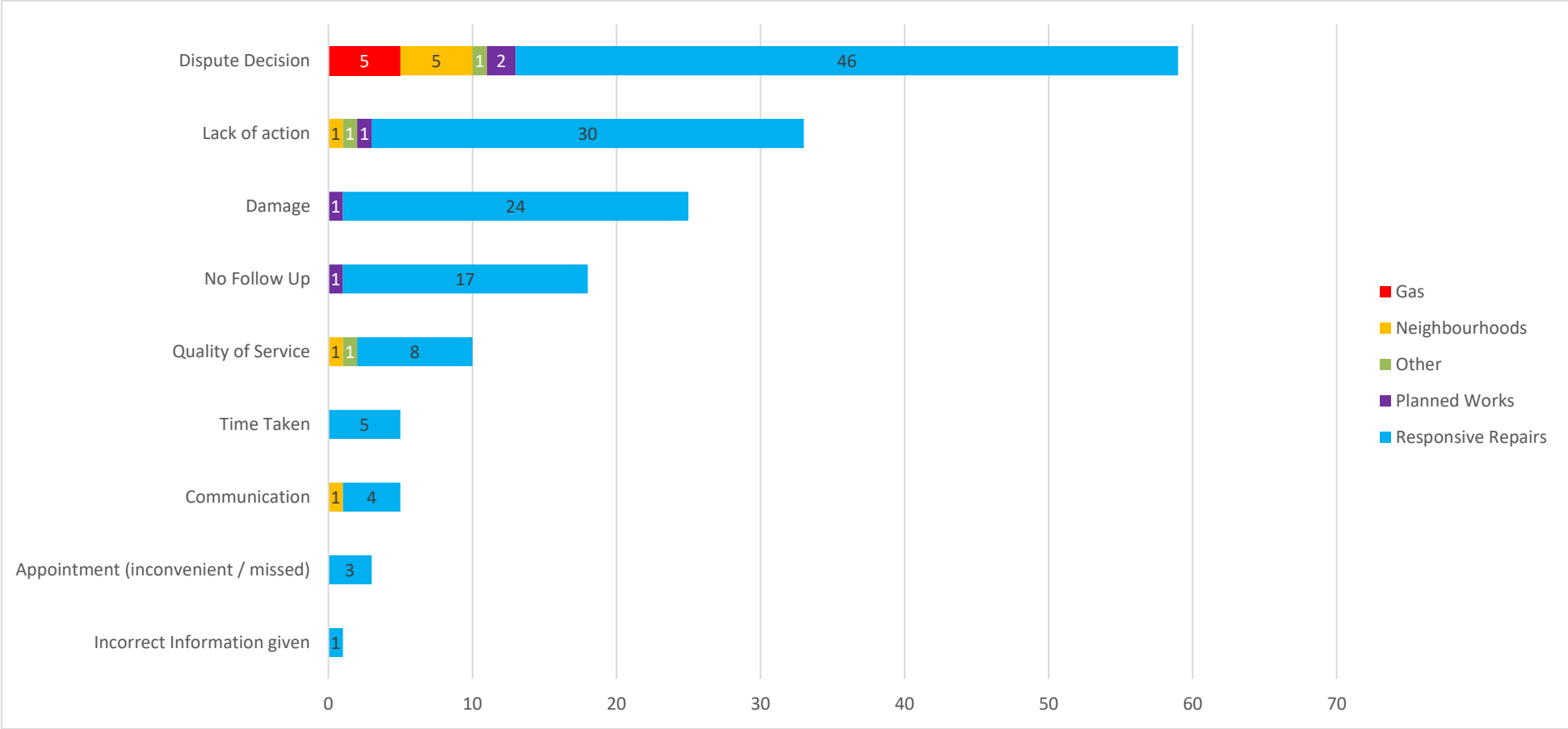
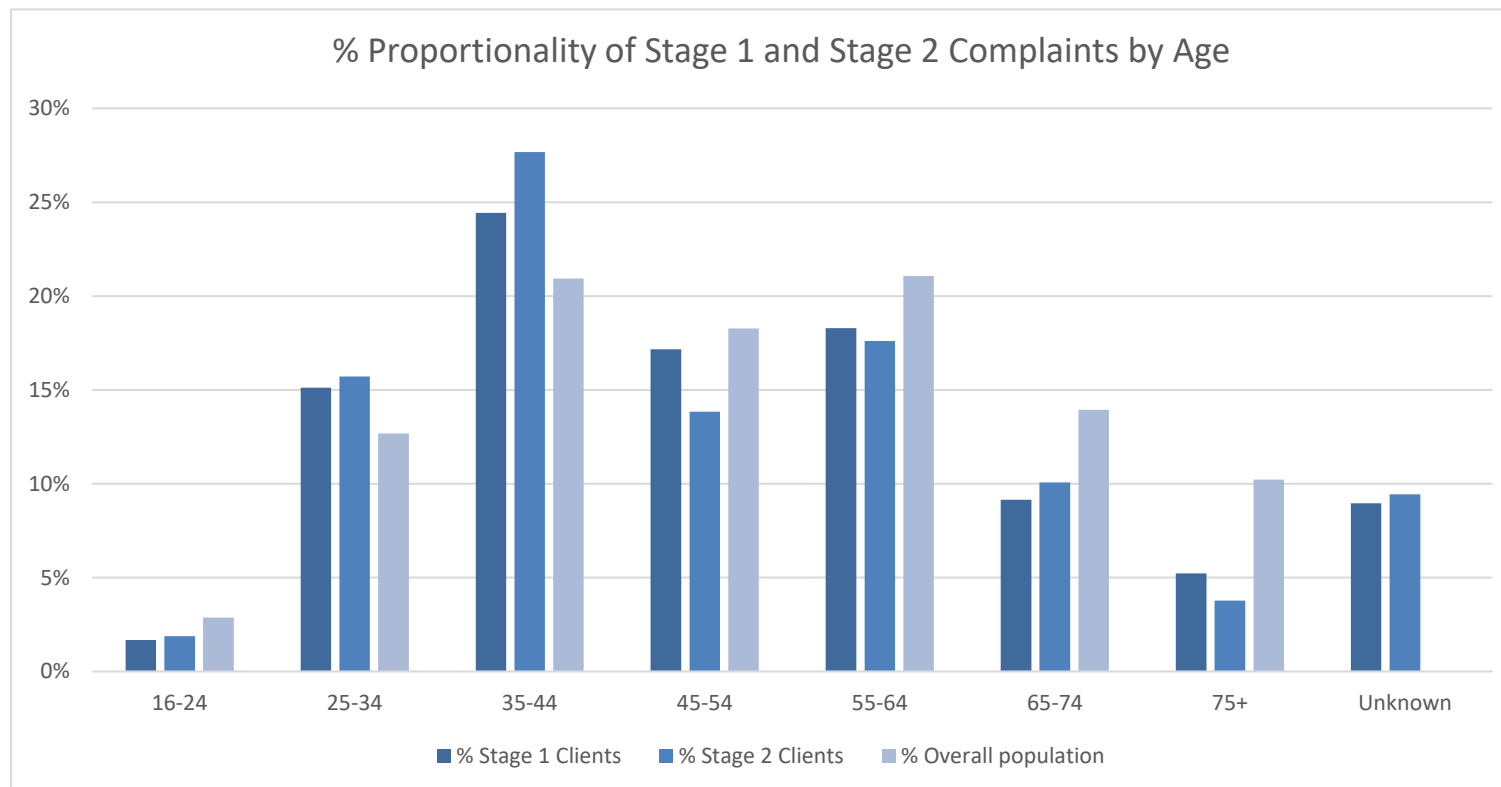


Table 2: Stage 2 Complaints received in year by Service Area and Theme



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.

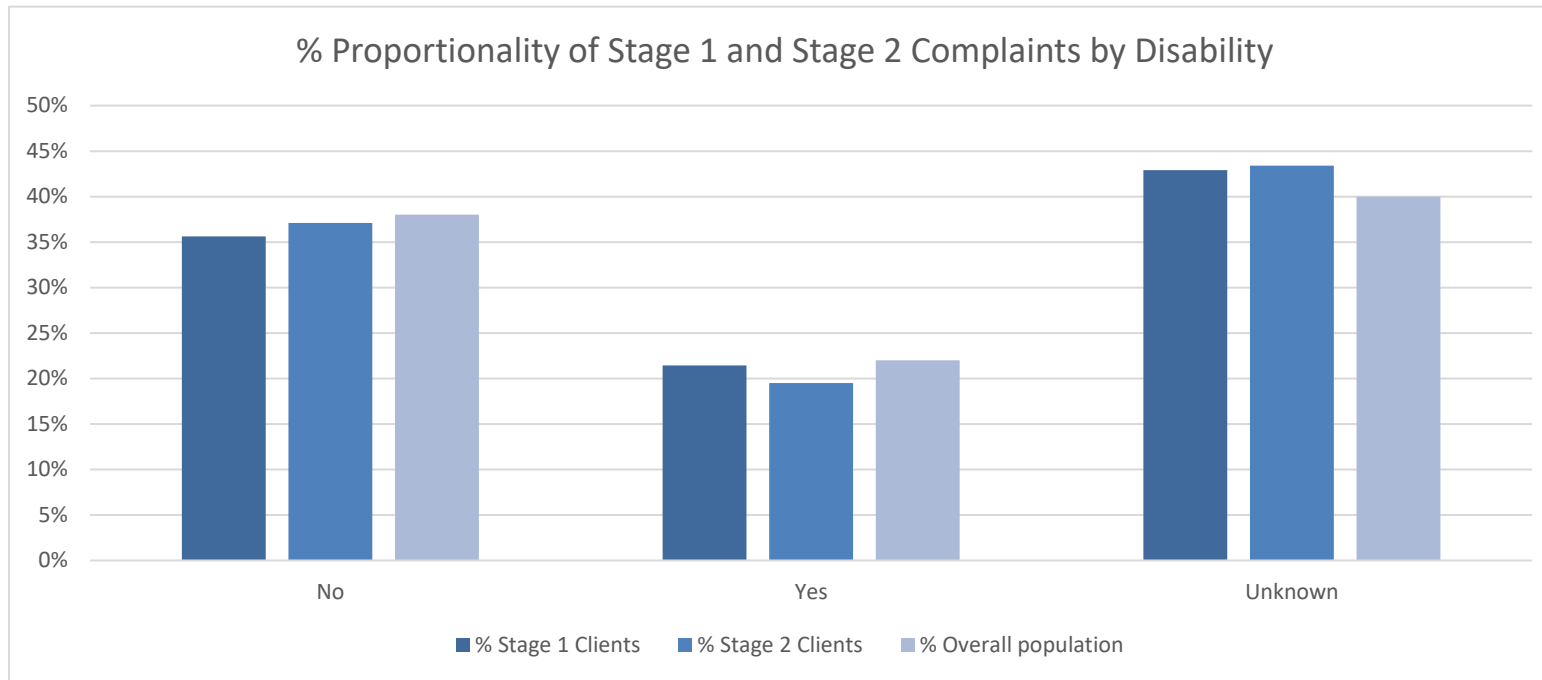


Age band	% Stage 1 Clients	% Stage 2 Clients	% Overall Population
16-24	2%	2%	3%
25-34	15%	16%	13%
35-44	24%	28%	21%
45-54	17%	14%	18%
55-64	18%	18%	21%
65-74	9%	10%	14%
75+	5%	4%	10%
Unknown*	9%	9%	0%

* 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 or a leaseholder who has sublet.

Disability:

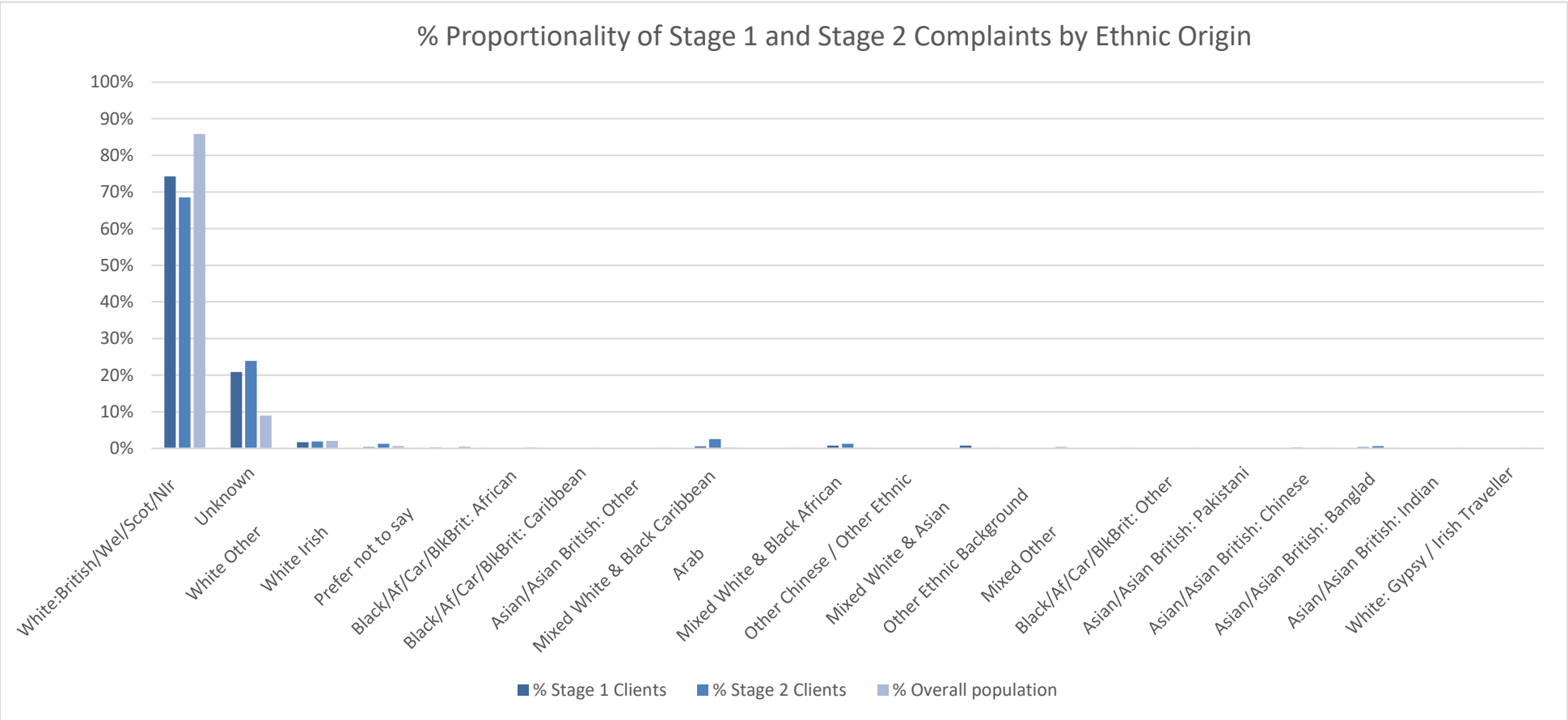
Where a tenant has made a Complaint that is comparable to the proportion with known disabilities.



Disability	% Stage 1 Clients	% Stage 2 Clients	% Overall Population
No	36%	37%	38%
Yes	21%	19%	22%
Unknown	43%	43%	40%

Ethnic Origin:

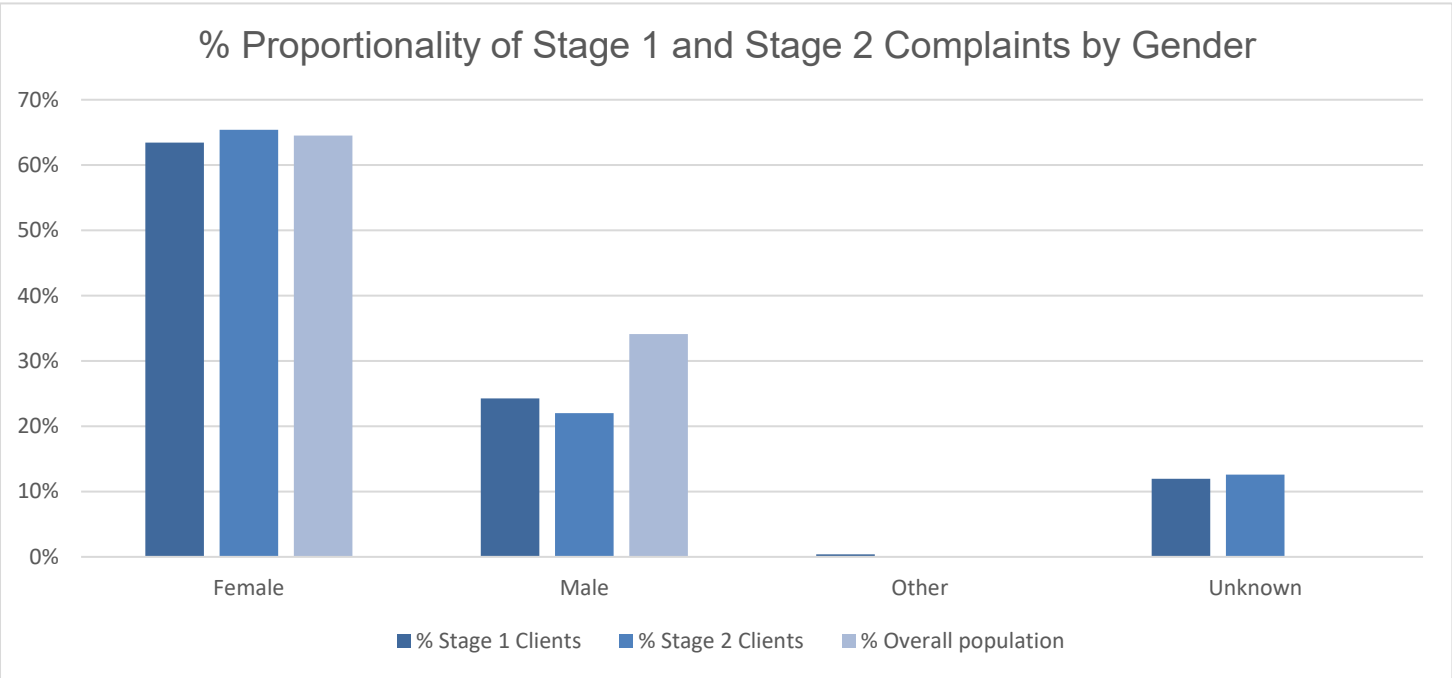
Where ethnicity has been recorded, White British customers continue to represent the majority of complainants, reflecting the overall customer profile.



Ethnic Origin	% Stage 1 Clients	% Stage 2 Clients	% Overall Population
White:British/Wel/Scot/Nlr	74%	69%	85.86%
Unknown	21%	24%	8.99%
White Other	2%	2%	2.05%
White Irish	0%	1%	0.64%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	0.53%
Black/Af/Car/BlkBrit: African			0.29%
Black/Af/Car/BlkBrit: Caribbean			0.04%
Asian/Asian British: Other			0.18%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	1%	3%	0.25%
Arab			0.12%
Mixed White & Black African	1%	1%	0.12%
Other Chinese / Other Ethnic			0.00%
Mixed White & Asian	1%	0%	0.12%
Other Ethnic Background			0.41%
Mixed Other			0.14%
Black/Af/Car/BlkBrit: Other			0.08%
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani			0.00%
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	0%	0%	0.04%
Asian/Asian British: Banglad	0%	1%	0.04%
Asian/Asian British: Indian			0.02%
White: Gypsy / Irish Traveller			0.10%

Gender:

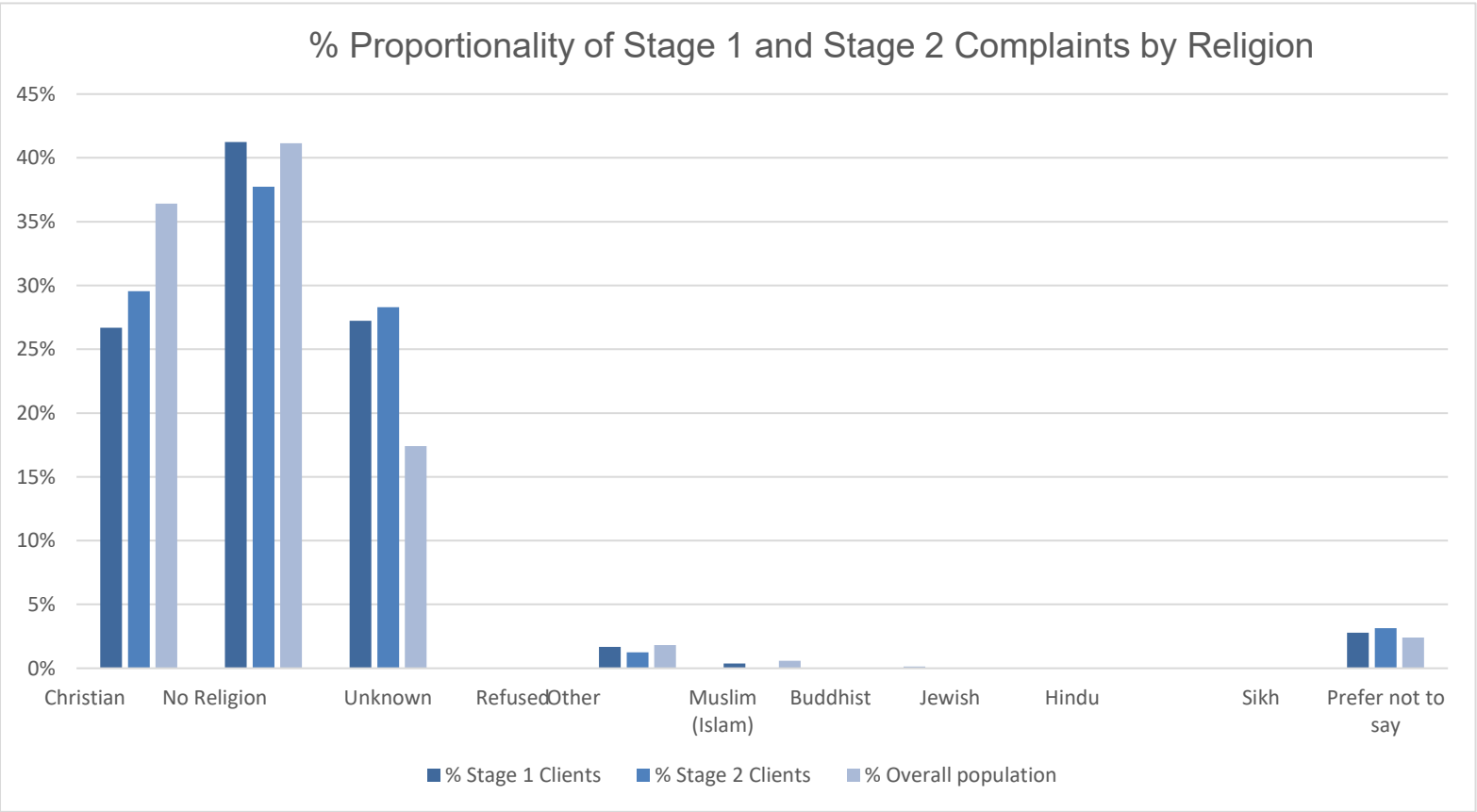
Female customers are broadly represented in complaints at a rate consistent with their proportion of the overall population, while male customers appear to be underrepresented in complaints.



Gender	% Stage 1 Clients	% Stage 2 Clients	% Overall Population
Female	63%	65%	65%
Male	24%	22%	34%
Other / Gender Neutral	0%	0%	0%
Unknown	12%	13%	

Religion:

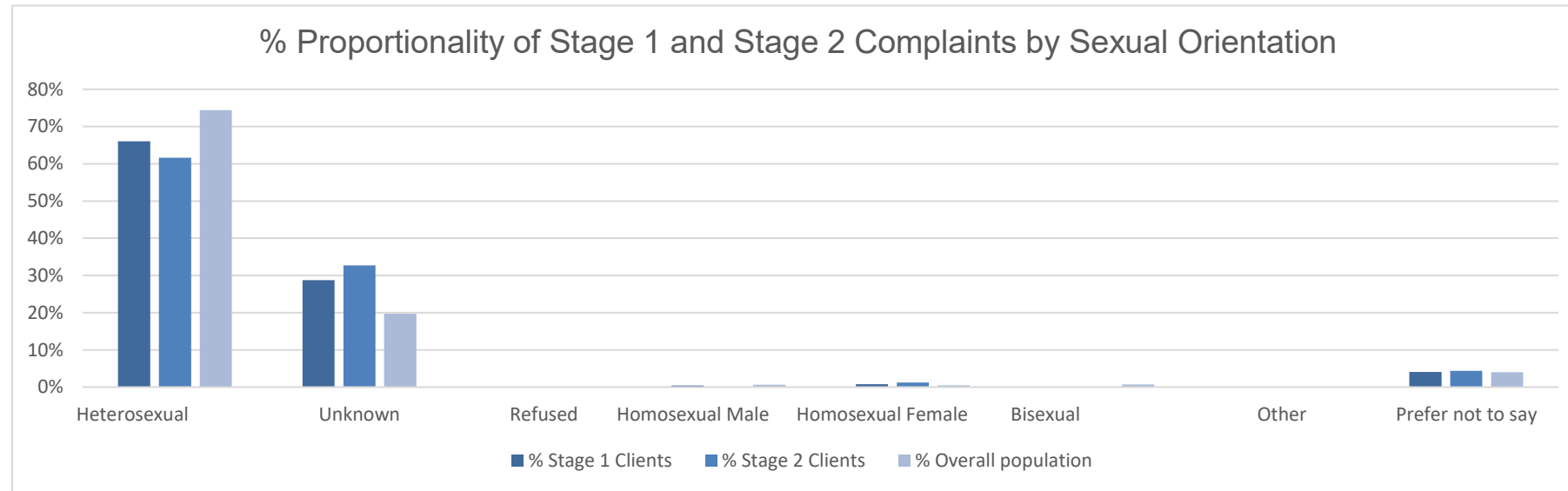
Fluctuations between known and unknown religion or belief data are evident, with a higher proportion of complaint records categorised as 'Unknown' compared to the overall population



Religion or belief	% Stage 1 Clients	% Stage 2 Clients	% Overall Population
Christian	27%	30%	36%
No Religion	41%	38%	41%
Unknown	27%	28%	17%
Refused			0%
Other	2%	1%	2%
Muslim (Islam)	0%	0%	1%
Buddhist			0%
Jewish			0%
Hindu			0%
Sikh			0%
Prefer not to say	3%	3%	2%

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	66%	62%	74%
Unknown	29%	33%	20%
Refused			0%
Homosexual Male	0%	0%	1%
Homosexual Female	1%	1%	0%
Bisexual			1%
Other			0%
Prefer not to say	4%	4%	4%

Actions taken to put things right or how we do things differently because of resident feedback. April 2025 – March 2026:

Service Area	What you told us	What we did
Responsive Repairs	On some occasions, we inaccurately recorded that access was refused when appointments were missed.	We strengthened oversight of appointments and failed visits. Contractors are required to accurately record access attempts, and our teams now review all reported failed visits before cases are closed to prevent incorrect “no access” records
Responsive Repairs	Complex repairs, particularly damp and mould cases, were not always tracked through to full resolution.	We enhanced case tracking for complex and damp-related repairs. Damp and mould cases now receive additional oversight, including supervision by an allocated contractor Supervisor, joint working with Housing Officers and Repairs Inspectors, follow-up inspections, and post-completion inspections to confirm works meet the pre-approved and agreed schedule.
Responsive Repairs	Contractors were not always effectively managed, and delays were not identified early enough.	We’ve improved how contractors are managed so delays are spotted and addressed sooner. Regular review meetings now take place to check progress on open works and any issues, allowing for early intervention.
ASB	Cases sometimes lacked clear direction, leading to delays or uncertainty about what would happen next.	We introduced clear action planning and reviews. Each ASB case now has a documented action plan at the outset, with agreed timescales, regular reviews, and recorded follow-up to prevent drift or unnecessary delay.
Complaints	Complaints were sometimes answered late, and once a complaint was logged it wasn’t always clear what was happening next.	We’ve provided additional training, expanded the complaints team and improved how complaints are tracked and monitored. This means complaints are now followed up robustly, escalated when needed, and responded to on time, with clearer communication throughout.