

Curo Complaints Annual Report

2021-22



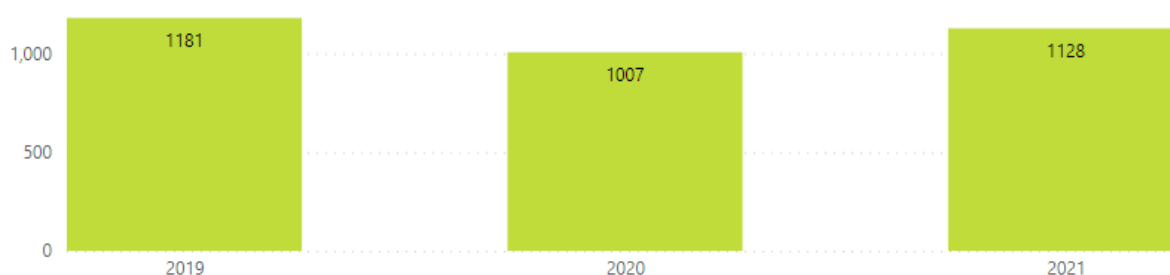
Curo Complaints Annual Report 2021-22

Over the last year at Curo, we have been working hard to improve our complaints performance to help resolve complaints quicker and provide a better experience for our customers when they do have a reason to complain.

In this report we look in detail at the types and numbers of complaints we received between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. We also compare this to results from previous years and review the information to understand what things different service areas need to focus on to improve their services and reduce complaints. We've also provided some detail on changes we have made throughout the year to structure ourselves in a way that will positively impact on our ability to manage complaints quickly and appropriately.

Summary of complaints received

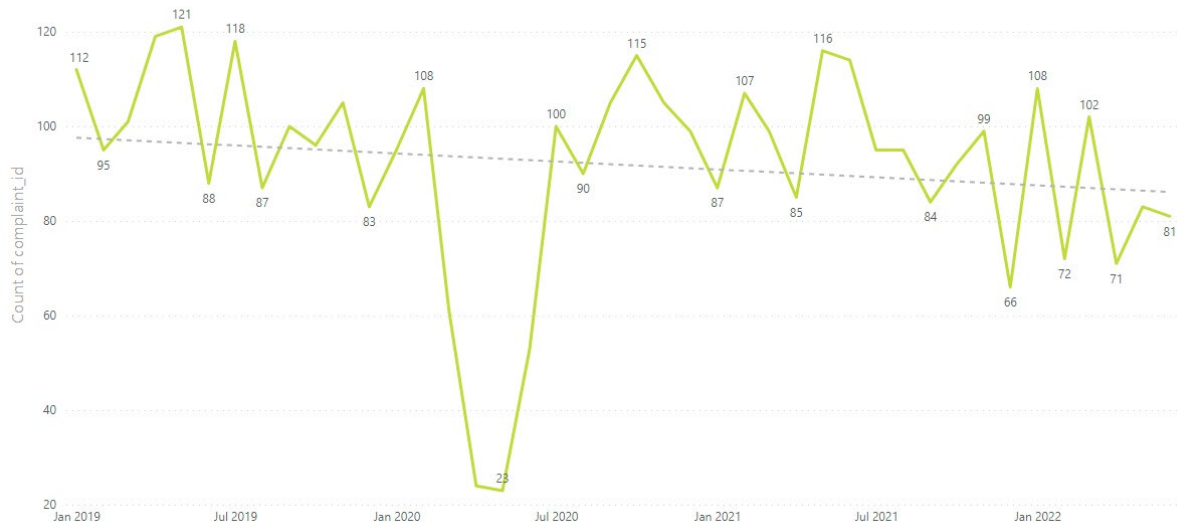
Number of complaints received by year



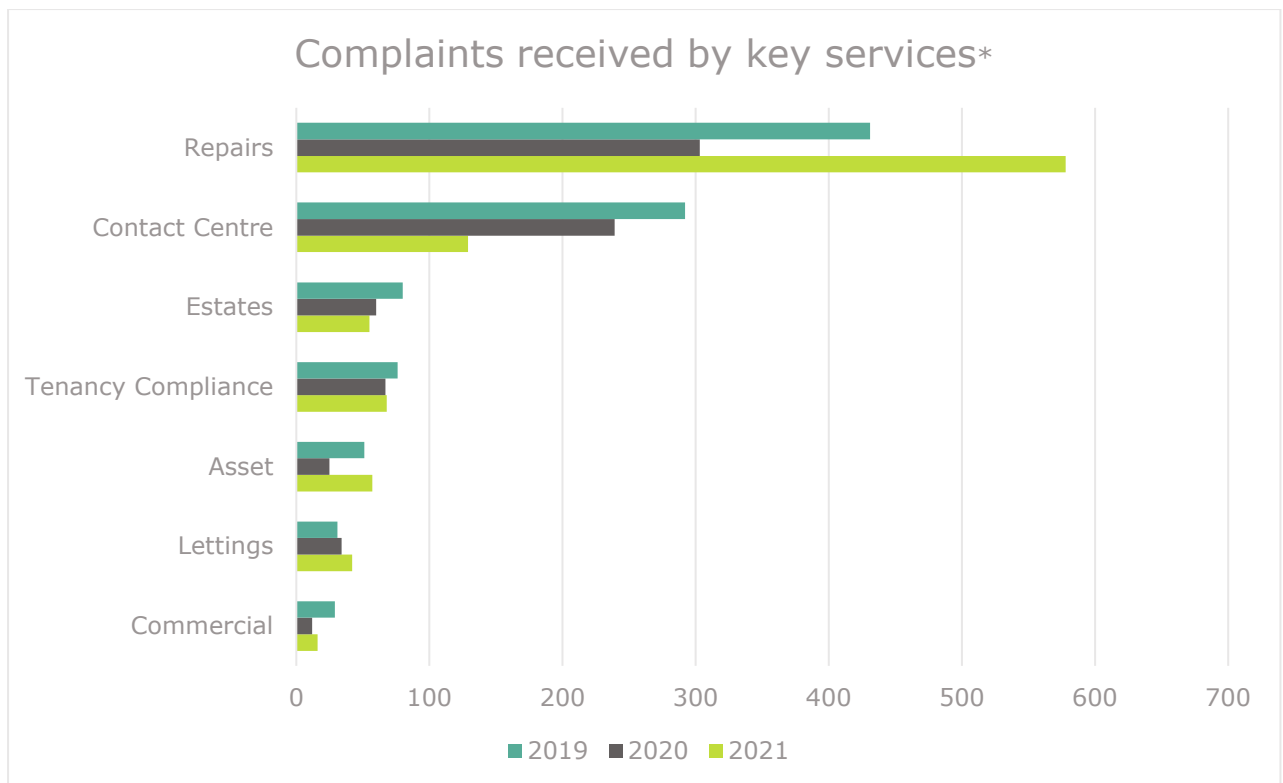
In the last year, we have seen an increase in the number of complaints received overall, seeing an additional 123 complaints logged compared to last year. Whilst this is an increase compared to 2020-21, we have seen a small decrease when looking at 2019-20. We have to keep in mind that the reduction we saw during 2020-21 reflects an overall reduction in customer contact during the early stages of the pandemic. Overall, we are seeing a steady rate in the volume of complaints received year on year.

The chart below shows this in more detail, demonstrating the peaks and troughs throughout the last two years, and the overall trend as a dotted line.

Number of complaints received over time



With the exception of the mid-pandemic dip, the three lowest volumes received within a month have been recorded in more recent months. Through collaborative work with other organisations in the sector along with the Institute of Customer Service (ICS), we know that the housing sector is seeing a significant increase in complaints, some with an increase of more than 50% year-on-year. A rise in complaints has also been seen across all other sectors and the ICS have reported that complaints are at their highest ever volume.



* 2019 = 19/20 2020=20/21 2021=21/22

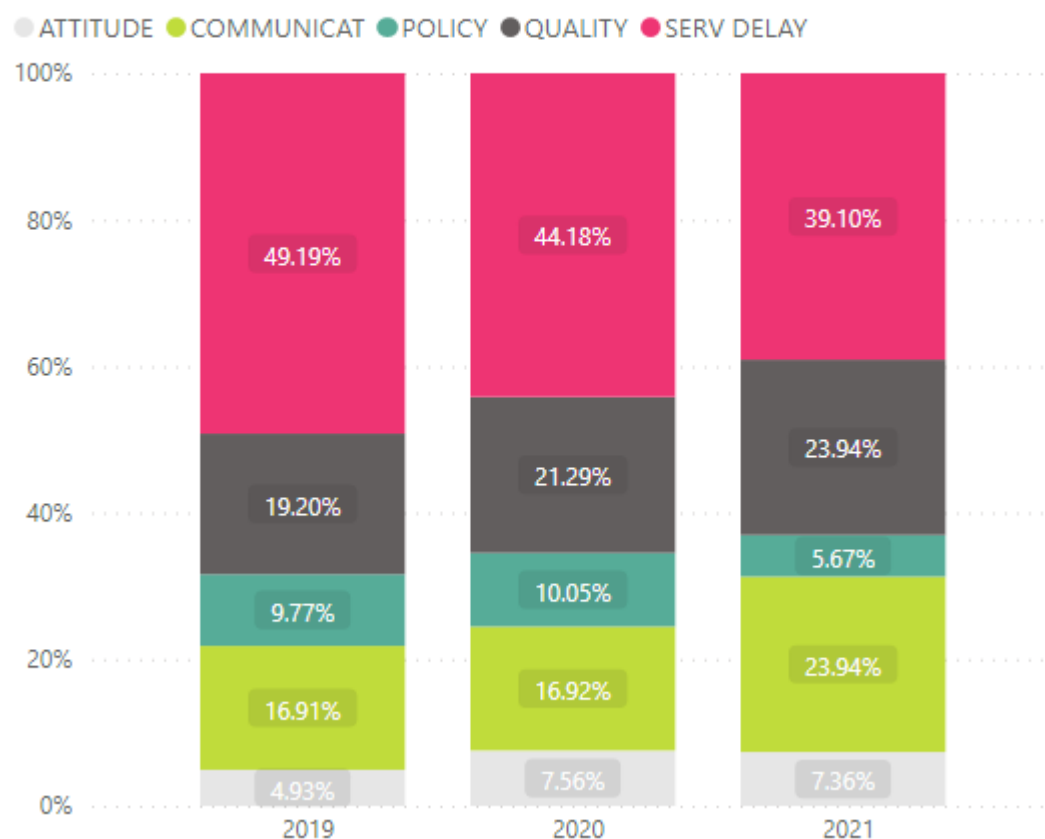
Our Contact Centre and Estates teams have seen a continual decrease in the number of complaints received related to their service areas, whilst Tenancy Compliance has remained the same compared to last year. We can see that although they receive smaller volumes of complaints overall, our Asset, Lettings and Commercial teams have experienced a small increase in the number of complaints they have received and the most significant increase in overall volumes has been in our Repairs service.

In the first half of 2021-22, we were still faced with backlogs in outstanding repairs to be completed, which was an ongoing challenge throughout the pandemic. As a result of this, we had limited availability in the diaries for our trades colleagues to attend appointments, and our contractors had staff shortages and delays in securing materials to complete required works. A combination of these factors did result in more complaints as customers were waiting longer than normal for reported repairs to be completed.

We made some temporary changes to combat these challenges, which involved the internal transfer of some of our skilled colleagues from other teams into our repairs service, and the recruitment of several agency colleagues. This significantly increased the capacity within the team and contributed to a reduction in the number of open repairs and an improved turnaround time between the repair being reported and completed. This also helped to prevent further increase of complaints received about repairs.

Themes

Number of complaints received by theme



Service delay

Despite a proportional decrease against the last two years, service delay remains the key driver for complaints across the business. Whilst we have to acknowledge that we were still experiencing the knock-on effects of the pandemic in the early parts of 2021 and this will have impacted on the number of service delay complaints, we must maintain our focus on this area and have implemented changes to help address this, which we can see has had a positive impact.

Quality

Quality also remains in a similar position amongst our overall complaint types and is the second most common reason for complaints along with communication and from looking at the data we have available, it's possible that where we have improved turnaround times to reduce service delay complaints, this may have resulted in the quality of work suffering, leading to this increase. We will continue to monitor this and work to strike the right balance between the two.

Communication

Communication complaints have increased by around 7% compared to the last two years and these types of complaints are often related to situations where we either have failed to communicate with our customers about something or where we haven't communicated well internally, resulting in a poorer level of service being provided.

Policy

We've seen a good reduction in the volume of policy complaints being received, where these have almost halved. In the earlier part of the year, Curo appointed our Director of Policy, a new position which has not been as much of an area of focus for us previously. As this focus increases, we have been working to improve the clarity of our existing policies and how these are communicated to customers when they do have concerns around the policies we are following.

Attitude

The level of attitude complaints has remained similar compared to last year and highlights potential issues with the behaviour or attitude of colleagues and contractors. We have increased focus on performance management and training/development requirements which may be needed as a result of these types of complaints to support colleagues to provide a better service and prevent customers needing to raise complaints of this nature. All attitude complaints are always discussed with the relevant colleagues and improvements agreed with their managers.

Complaints performance

Measure	2020-21 Actual	2021-22 Actual	Variance
Number of complaints received	1005	1128	+123
Average time to reach a resolution (days)*	35.7	29.8	-5.9
Average time to resolve a complaint (days)*	74.5	59.9	-14.6
Percentage of cases resolved at first stage (Resolution First)	44%	66%	+22%
Percentage of cases resolved at Level 2	45%	24%	-21%
Percentage of cases resolved at Management Review	11%	10%	-1%
Percentage of customers satisfied with Customer Resolution Service	57%	53%	-4

** Average number of days to reach an agreed resolution is the time spent investigating the issue and agreeing with the customer what a suitable solution will be. Average time to resolve a complaint is the full time a complaint is open, right up until the issue is fully resolved.*

Following the effects of the pandemic, we returned to a more 'normal' year over the last 12 months, receiving similar levels of contact compared to pre-Covid times so despite the increase in overall complaints received, our position related to complaints has been maintained.

During the last 12 months, Curo has undergone a restructure, within which the Customer Resolution team moved into the Customer Contact team. This decision was made to bring the teams communicating with our customers most often closer together. Our Customer Contact team manage approximately 75% of complaints the first stage of our process (Resolution 1st) so by bringing the teams closer together, we have been able to develop a more consistent and focused approach across the first two stages of complaint handling.

Following this change, we focused on some key areas of improvement, predominantly the reduction of the average time to reach a resolution and the average time to resolve a complaint, together with the aim of successfully resolving our longest standing complaint cases, while offering and delivering suitable resolutions to our residents as soon as possible within the process and avoiding any unnecessary delays. We have seen a reduction in both areas and will continue to maintain the focus, achieving continually speedier resolutions for all.

In addition to this, we have continued to focus on increasing the volume of complaints resolved at Resolution 1st to encourage complaint resolution at the earliest stage possible within the process. With the improved relationships and closer working between Customer Resolution and the Customer Contact team achieved through our restructure, we have seen a great improvement in this area with 22% more complaints being resolved at the first stage compared to 2020-21. This work has subsequently resulted in a reduction in complaints being escalated to Level 2 and then again at Management Review, which is the third and final stage of our current complaints process.

Customer satisfaction in relation to complaint handling is an area that has been impacted over the last year, reducing by 5% compared to the year before. Through analysis completed, we have noticed that responses to the complaint satisfaction surveys often relate to the reason the customer had to complain in the first place, rather than how it was handled after their complaint was logged. A review of our survey questions and how to differentiate the two aspects is being carried out and we are looking at how we can be clearer in what we're asking to help us gain more accurate feedback on our complaint handling. This will allow us to identify opportunities to improve, provide a better service when managing complaints, resulting in a happier customer at the end of the process.

Ombudsman cases

Housing Ombudsman Service

This year, we were notified of four formal investigations by the Housing Ombudsman into complaints that had exhausted our internal complaints process and the customers complaining had referred their case to the Housing Ombudsman Service. We have received determinations from two of these cases and are still awaiting determination on the others.

No maladministration was found in relation to one of the investigations completed. This complaint was about Curo's approach to annual home safety checks during the pandemic and the use of Personal Protective Equipment by Curo colleagues at this time.

The second investigation was about Curo's handling of a complaint about noise transference between two properties. Their determination found no maladministration relating to the proposed repairs; however, they did deem that there was maladministration related to complaint handling, taking too long to respond and not clearly communicating to the customer which stage of the process their complaint was at throughout. We have formally apologised to the resident and paid £250 in compensation for this failure. We have also changed our processes to make sure this doesn't happen again.

Whilst we have seen an increase in complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service after exhausting our own process, we believe this is predominantly due to increased publicity and customer awareness of the service, which has been strongly promoted by the Government. We also ensure customers are kept informed throughout our own process about their options should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome, including the Ombudsman's early advice service. This is in line with the Complaint Handling Code, that we must comply with.

The Housing Ombudsman Service have themselves experienced a significant increase in the number of complaints being referred to them and saw a 95% increase during the final quarter of 2021/22 compared with the previous quarter. This increase has led to backlogs in their investigations, meaning we have to wait longer to receive their outcomes. On average, it has taken six months for decisions to be made on complaints our residents have referred to their service.

Through their early advice service, we received 29 contacts throughout the year, where customers had contacted the Ombudsman due to being unhappy with the progress being made within our internal process. We were able to resolve 26 of

these internally to the customer's satisfaction and without the need to escalate to formal investigation, and the remaining three cases were included in the four formal investigations mentioned previously.

We will continue to use these contacts as an opportunity to step in and understand what's going wrong for our customers with a view to resolving as early as possible for them.

We've spent a lot of time in the last year learning from Housing Ombudsman guidance including their Complaint Handling Code, thematic reviews and sector development activities, where we meet with representatives from the organisation along with other landlords to discuss best practice and regulatory requirements. This helps us ensure our services and processes remain compliant and up to date with any changes. We also arranged for complaints training to be delivered by the Ombudsman team to a number of colleagues across the business to ensure all teams have a lead who can guide them with complaint handling and help improve the overall quality of complaint responses for our customers.

Complaints learning

This year, our learning activities have been much more focused on the improvement of the complaints process itself, including the length of time complaints remain open and the communication relating to the process, rather than specific service area improvements identified through root cause analysis.

This is because when the Customer Resolution team became part of the Customer Contact team, it became clear that there were inconsistencies in complaint handling across the different stages. This, teamed with the average times to agree resolutions and subsequently resolve complaints, and the Housing Ombudsman feedback through their determination, told us that it was important to get the overarching principles right to improve the process. We're confident that having made these changes and improved relationships across teams handling complaints in the business, this will allow us the time needed for reflection and root cause analysis off the back of complaints being raised and a focus on wider service improvements in the next year.

The key changes made to improve our complaints handling process have been;

- Complaint stage is stated during acknowledgement at each stage of the process, so customers know where they are in the process
- formal communication is given any time a complaint is escalated so that customers know what the next steps are
- complaint resolutions are put formally in writing to the customer, unless they have a specific need for this to be communicated in another method
- extensions to response timeframes, where required, are to be agreed with the customer.
- If any of the above do not happen during the process, this should be acknowledged within the final response and feedback should be provided to the relevant colleague(s)/team(s) for coaching and improvements in future.

We're confident that by formalising these steps within the process, we can make complaints clearer and easier for customers to understand and will help us adhere to Housing Ombudsman expectations all the time.

Other activities we've carried out to support with the above include significant work across the Customer Contact Team to eradicate the backlog of investigations at Level 2, speeding up the complaints process, and updates to our complaints and compensation policies and procedures, ensuring we are fully compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

We continue to work with the Housing Ombudsman and other landlords to develop 'best practice' for learning from complaints. We've taken part in a number of sessions during the year to understand what activities work well in this space and it's become clear that the challenges of learning are a sector-wide issue. Many other landlords, like Curo, have previously not had the capacity to complete detailed root cause analysis but are now starting to implement new frameworks to achieve this. We continue to work with these groups to share ideas and successes with a view to building an effective learning framework which will contribute to a vast improvement in our services.

Despite the challenges, there are some service-specific areas of learning we have been able to implement, resulting in better satisfaction rates and less complaints for particular teams. Some examples are;

- Agile Voids project – through this project, we've had the opportunity to explore complaints linked to our void properties in more detail. Analysis indicated that having a quick turnaround time for the team to make the property 'ready to let' sometimes led to a poorer quality of the work due to time restraints, resulting in customers being unhappy with the standard of the property when they moved in. The team have listened to customers who told us that they would rather wait a little longer to move into a property that is truly ready. Having increased the turnaround time for empty homes, the team have seen a good reduction in complaints being received month on month.
- Multi-team complaints – we identified a pattern in complaints which involved both our repairs and asbestos teams where there were communication challenges due to the number of parties involved in arranging works (two teams within Curo and two external contractors). This often led to delays in work being completed or errors occurring because of mixed messages between the various people involved, and no one person taking responsibility for keeping the customer updated. The two Curo teams have agreed to meet on a regular basis to discuss any upcoming works that involve them both, agreeing a plan of action and nominating one person to be the point of contact for that customer.
- On a larger scale, we have also introduced a 'complex case' working group for scenarios like the above involving numerous parties across Curo. It also applies to long standing complaints which are of a complex nature or for customers who have specific needs. A case manager is assigned to each complex case and is responsible for overseeing that everything needed is completed in a reasonable timeframe and ensuring the

customer is kept up to date throughout. Group members are also empowered to make decisions quickly and escalate areas of concern as soon as possible. This approach has proven successful and we hope to develop it further so that more customers can benefit from this work and our complaints can be resolved quicker, with customers feeling supported throughout.

Complaints Review Forum

We continue to meet with our Complaints Review Forum on a quarterly basis and have returned to face to face meetings, which has been a great opportunity to reconnect with our engaged residents. This has opened conversations up for much more detailed discussion and has been very much welcomed by the group.

During each meeting, the group review randomly selected complaints which are anonymised. They review the way the complaint was handled and provide feedback on each one, including things Curo could have done better. Each complaint is then given a 'pass' or a 'fail' based on whether each member thinks the complaint was handled appropriately or not, and if decisions made were fair.

From the complaints reviewed over the last year, we achieved an 86.4% pass rate, up from 86% in 2020-21. We hope that as the group continues and we receive more feedback, we can continue to improve this year on year.

Planned Improvements

We continue to engage with customers as much as possible when it comes to complaints and following the introduction of bi-monthly reporting to our resident Oversight Group, the Customer Resolution team has been selected for review via our Scrutiny Activity Group. The group review a business area in great detail, meeting and interviewing team members, gaining insight into processes and ways of working and analysing key performance data including some of the detail shared in this report and customer satisfaction feedback.

The areas of focus set by the Oversight Group include the following:

- 1. Review the complaints process**
- 2. Improve Customer Satisfaction in relation to complaints**
- 3. Reduce the length of time to resolve a complaint**
- 4. Ensure the complaints process is easy for colleagues to understand and use**

The group will use these objectives and the information shared with them throughout the 12-week process to make recommendations and improvement suggestions with clear direction on which changes are 'must-haves' through to those they 'would like' to see.

This will then set a clear plan and actions for the business to work through over the coming year in priority order and we hope to see outcomes such as a further improved complaint process, which allows us to resolve them quicker for

customers and makes the experience of both our customers and our colleagues better when working to resolve complaints. As a result of this, we're hopeful that we will see improved feedback through our customer satisfaction surveys and that those who do need to complain still feel positive about Curo having gone through the complaints journey.

Overall, the last year has heightened the profile of complaints for colleagues across the business and allowed us to start embedding a 'complaints obsessed' culture. Our leaders set the tone and drive this approach throughout, and our customers help us to know what works and what doesn't. We will continue in this vein in the year to come and these drivers along with combined feedback from all of our engaged resident groups, will help to move Curo forward in the complaints space, create a better service for those who do have cause for complaint and build time to truly learn about what's causing our failures and build the fixes we need.