

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 2023-24. 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 2024, and service improvement initiatives.

This is the advised content required for the annual reporting now stipulated by the HOS, linked to the newly launched 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 June 2024.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council Housing Management Board provide a response to this report, ahead of the 30 June 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 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.
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	<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 landlords 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&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&C remains open to change and committed to getting the basics right to satisfy both our tenants and regulators requirements</p>
EDI Implications	To ensure we are compliant with the HOS Complaint Handling Code a new Complaints Policy is currently going through a review and approval process, which incorporates engaging with tenants, including Tenant Board Members giving them the opportunity to influence the policy. This Policy was also consulted on with wider tenants via a social media group which asked them for their comments on the policy. Also, specific cohorts were asked their views on specific policies i.e. tenants who had raised a complaint were asked to provide their views.

1. Background

- 1.1 In conjunction with the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) Complaint Handling Code, our governing body (or equivalent) should receive regular updates on the volume, categories, and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance including compliance with the Ombudsman’s orders.
- 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 FH’s website, via the Customer Connect Hub and directly to FH colleagues.

2. Summary of Complaints Data 2023-24

	Stage 1 Received	Stage 1 Withdrawn by resident or not accepted as complaint (policy exclusions, HR matters etc.)	Stage 1 Total investigated	Stage 2 Escalated and reviewed	(Stage 1 & 2) Total complaints received and investigated
2022-23	259	N/A	177	6	265
2023-24	492	35	457 *	29	521
Variance on previous year	90% increase		158% increase	383% increase	97% increase

*Cases opened pre-01 April 2024 (44 Cases) which are still open and being investigated are included in this total.

2.1 Stage 1 Analysis

2.1.1 Stage 1 complaints have been analysed in greater detail to determine the service area and the theme of the complaint. During 2023-24 there were 457 complaints investigated. On average, we received 9 complaints per week which required a full investigation.

2.1.2 **Appendix 1** shows the breakdown of Stage 1 complaints by the service area and the theme of the complaint.

2.1.3 The majority of Stage 1 complaints related to the Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) services, making up around 75% of all reported issues. This aligns with an observed increase in repair work, with the number of responsive repairs undertaken rising by approximately 11%, from 14,127 in 2022/23 to 15,859 in 2023/24.

2.1.4 Gas complaints comprised the second most complained about service (10%), with Planned works at 8%

2.1.5 The top three themes of dissatisfaction for all service areas were no follow-ups (31% (140/457), damage caused by contractor (13% (58/457) and quality of work (10% (45/457). These complaint types do not align to the national picture. For Q3 2023-24, the HOS reported that the top three complaint types were property condition, complaint handling and anti-social behaviour.

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

Outcome	Number and % of Cases 2023-24
Upheld	286 (69%)
Not Upheld	127 (31%)

2.1.7 Further analysis has shown that we have 47 households that have made more than 1 complaint, covering a variety of themes, during 2023-24.

2.2 Stage 2 Analysis

2.2.1 During 2023-24, FH received 29 Stage 2 complaints (an escalation rate of 6%) compared to 2022-23 when 6 were received (an escalation rate of 3%.)

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 our Repairs and Maintenance service with 76% complaints relating to this service.

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

Outcome	Number and % of Cases 2023-24
Upheld	19 (76%)
Not Upheld	6 (24%)

2.2.5 Further analysis has shown that we have 1 household that have escalated more than 1 complaint to stage 2 in 2023-24, covering a variety of themes.

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 25 and 54 compared to the HMC overall population, with a lower proportion from those aged over 55. However, those aged over 55 are more likely to escalate their complaint to stage 2. Female customers are overrepresented and customers with a diversity are underrepresented, indicating the need for further investigation into this matter.

3.3 Moving forward in 24/25 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.

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 2023-24, one case was investigated by the HOS, and the Ombudsman determined that in accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was No Maladministration. The learning and a reflection of this case will be presented to the next Council Housing Management Board.

4.2 The HOS has published individual landlord performance for landlords with 5 or more findings determined between 1 April 2022 and March 2023. CW&C had 1 finding.

4.3 The Housing Ombudsman publishes an annual landlord performance report for the complaints investigated by them involving members of the scheme, and they write to all members who have a 50% or above maladministration rate.

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 The self-assessment against the Code is required to be published by 30 June 2024.

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 2023–2024 as a direct result of complaints learning.

6.3 *Reviewed the process for temporary moves:*

To address communication issues leading to complaints related to decants, a review of the process and the information shared with tenants was completed. This has helped deliver consistency, improved the information provided to tenants prior to a decant so they better understand what we do and don't provide, ensures we provide a designated point of contact for tenants, and enhances coordination between internal teams.

6.4 *Created a new Complaints Panel*

This new panel was formed in April 2023 and is made up of Tenant Board Members, representatives from CW&C and FH to review 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 was shared with the Council Housing Board. This included the recommendation for specific complaint KPIs for complaint handling from April 2024 and expanding the membership to include to a local councillor and independent member.

6.5 *Complaints re-design project:*

ForHousing is undergoing a system redesign project related to complaints management. This initiative is re-engineering how we manage complaints using our Housing Management system and will help deliver tighter management of compliance with regulations, streamlined processes, and places the tenant at the centre of the complaints resolution process.

6.6 *Improvements to Follow on Works*

As a result of feedback from complaints that follow on works were not carried out, we have been working with our main contractor to create an action plan to improve. As a result of this, the trade supervisors now sit with the planners each week to assist with planning. The contractor is piloting a 'doorstep appointment' system allowing operatives to book

appointments for follow on work whilst they are with the tenant. We are monitoring this to measure the impact on such complaints.

6.7 *Quality of works and damage to property.*

We continue to monitor reports of operatives causing damage to property or providing lower than expected quality of work. In all cases the contractor raises such issues with the operative involved and monitors their performance in future.

As a result of complaints relating to damage caused during plastering work, we created a 'frequently asked questions' information sheet which is sent to all tenants who are to have plastering work completed so that they are aware of the implications of plastering work and the need to remove belongings from the area to avoid damage.

6.8 *Independent scrutiny and oversight of complaints*

Every quarter, the Complaints Panel consisting of representatives from the council, ForHousing and two tenant Board Members reviewed a sample of complaints. This provided assurance of compliance with the Housing Ombudsman code of conduct, identified any learning and provided recommendations for future handling and management of complaints.

6.9 These service improvements demonstrate ForHousing's/CW&C's commitment to addressing resident feedback, enhancing operational efficiency, and delivering high-quality services. By leveraging data analysis, resident feedback, and strategic objectives, ForHousing aims to continuously improve and exceed customer expectations.

7. Summary

7.1 In conclusion, the analysis of complaints data for 2023-24 highlights several key insights and areas for improvement within FH's 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 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 targeted investigation.

7.3 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.

7.4 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 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.

8.2 To ensure The Council Housing Management Board has sight and assurance throughout the year of complaints performance, a new quarterly performance report will be developed

aligned to the content of this report. This will ensure performance information meets the requirements of the HOS.

- 8.3 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 complaints 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 2023-24

Appendix 1

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

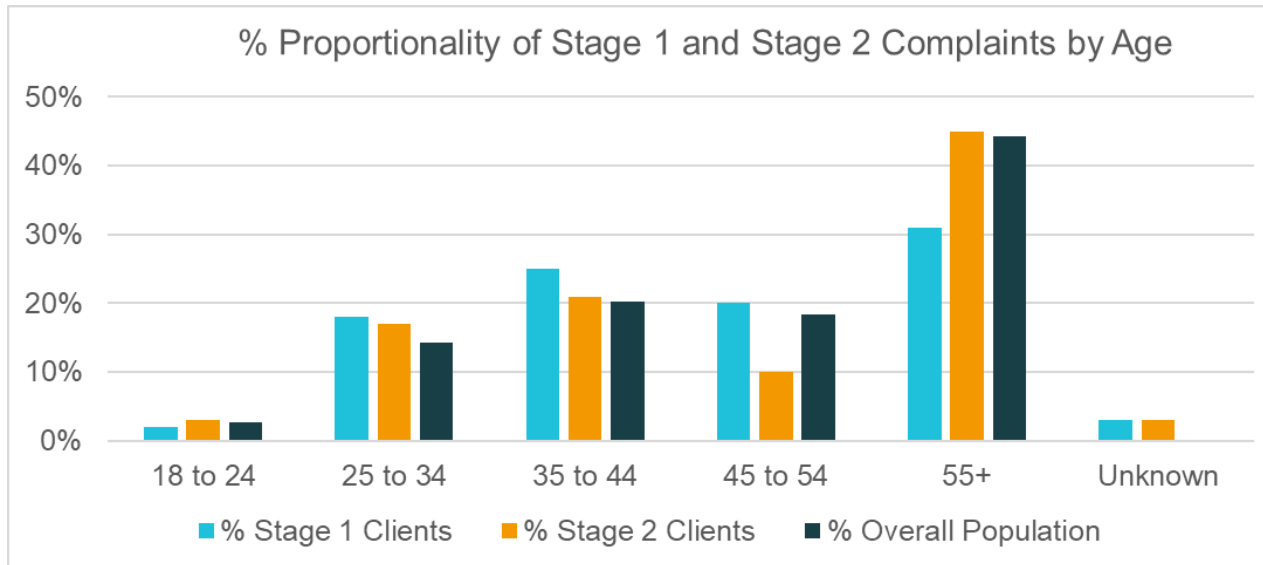
	Appointment Inconvenient	Damage Caused by Contractor	Dispute Decision	Incorrect Info Given	Misinformed	Missed Appointment	No Consultation	No Follow Up	Not Informed	Quality of Area	Quality of Property	Quality of Service	Quality of Work	Safety Concerns	Staff Confidential	Staff Not Confidential	Staff Operative	Grand Total
Adaptations		1									1							2
Allocations			1															1
Gas		2		2	2	7	1	10	5			4	6	2		1	3	45
Development - New Builds								2					1					3
Grounds Maintenance							1											1
Income Maximisation			1	1											1			3
Leasehold		2									1	1						4
Neighbourhoods			3	1	2		4	1	1	3		2			2	2		21
Planned Works		9	2		1	2	2	3	3		2	1	5	1				31
Responsive Repairs	5	43	7	15	20	25	9	123	20	2	11	22	32	1	1	6	1	343
Safety Checks						1							1					2
Sales								1										1
Grand Total	5	57	14	19	25	35	17	140	29	5	15	30	45	4	4	9	4	457

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

Row Labels	Damage Caused by Contractor	Incorrect Info Given	Missed Appointment	No Consultation	No Follow Up	Quality of Area	Quality of Property	Quality of Service	Quality of Work	Staff Operative	Grand Total
Gas		1									1
Leasehold								1			1
Neighbourhoods				1	1	1				1	4
Planned Works							1				1
Responsive Repairs	3		2		7		1	5	4		22
Grand Total	3	1	2	1	8	1	2	6	4	1	29

Insight Data

Age : We have received a higher proportion of complaints from those aged between 25 and 54 compared to the HMC overall population, with a lower proportion from those aged over 55.

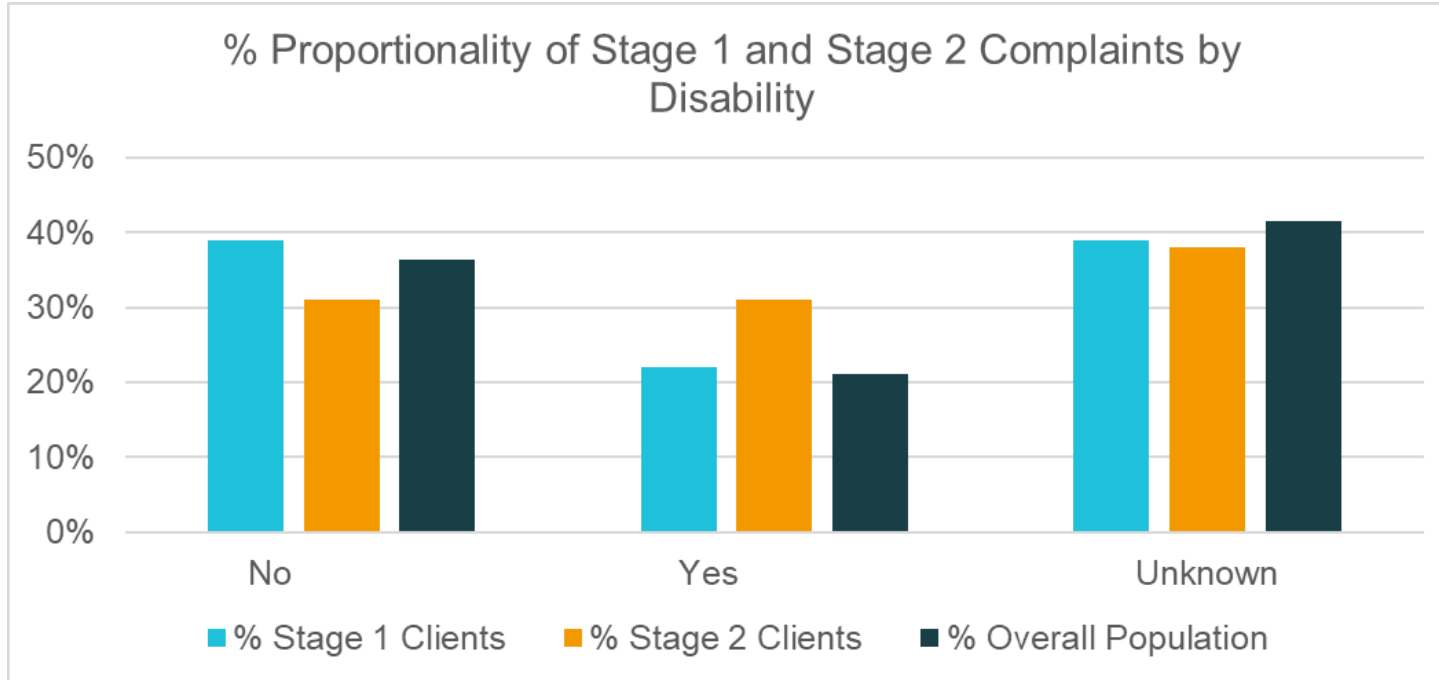


Age band	% Stage 1 Clients	% Stage 2 Clients	% Overall Population
18 to 24	2%	3%	3%
25 to 34	18%	17%	14%
35 to 44	25%	21%	20%
45 to 54	20%	10%	18%
55+	31%	45%	44%
Unknown	3%	3%	0%

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.

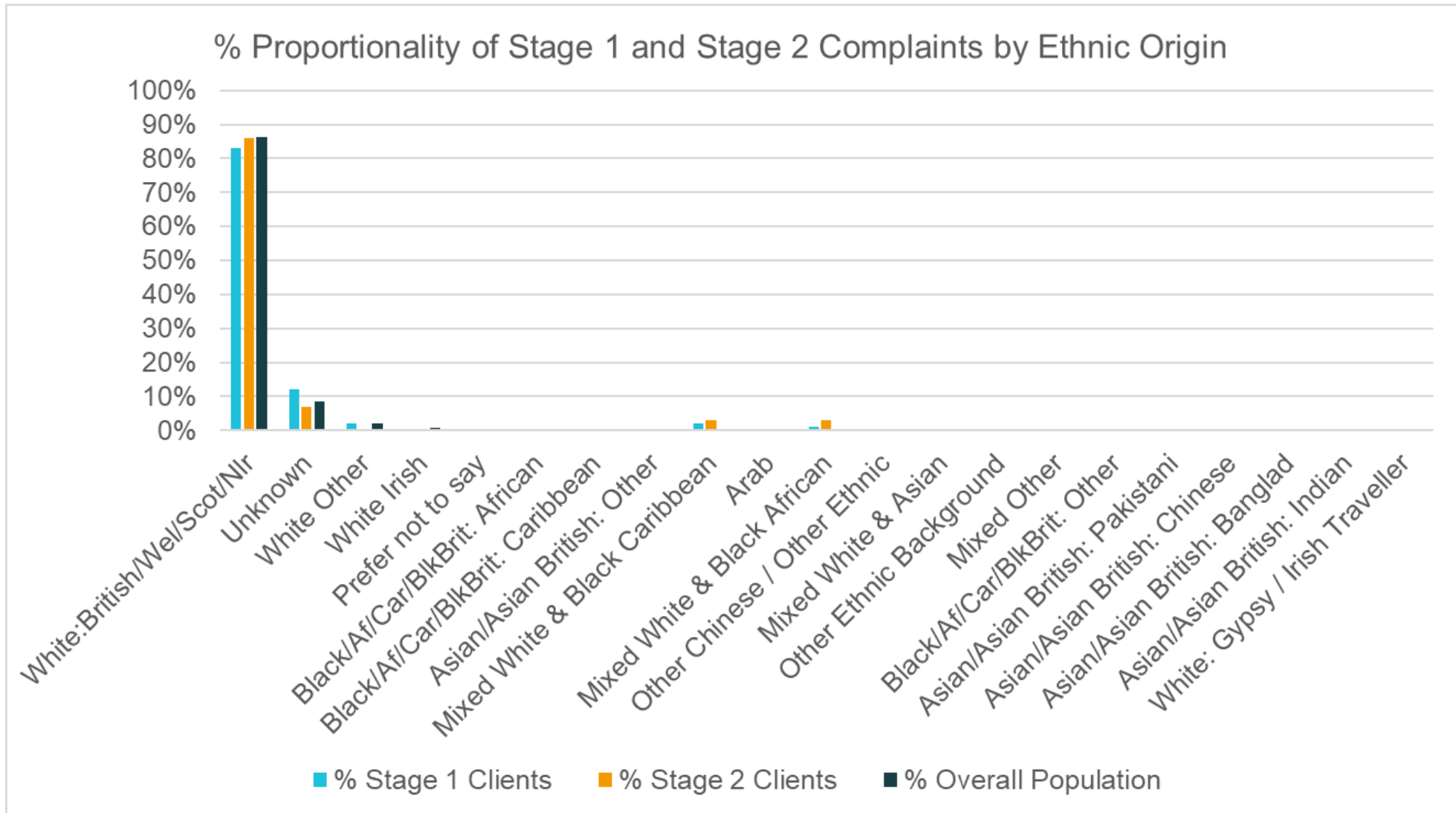
Note – the Unknown values against Stage 1 and Stage 2 are complaints from persons who are not tenants, such as owner occupiers who live next door to a Cheshire West and Chester owned property, a leaseholder who has sublet.

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



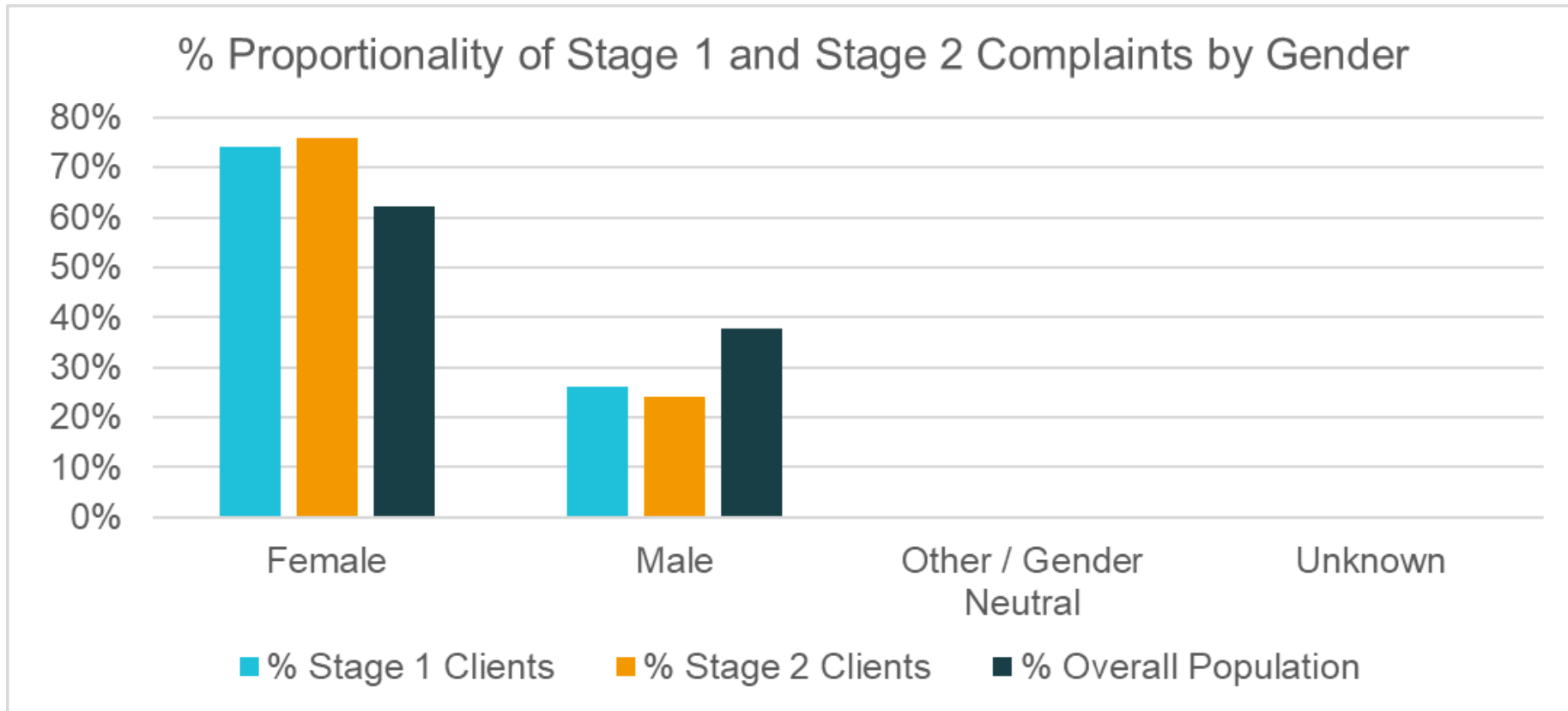
Disability	% Stage 1 Clients	% Stage 2 Clients	% Overall Population
No	39%	31%	36%
Yes	22%	31%	21%
Unknown	39%	38%	42%

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



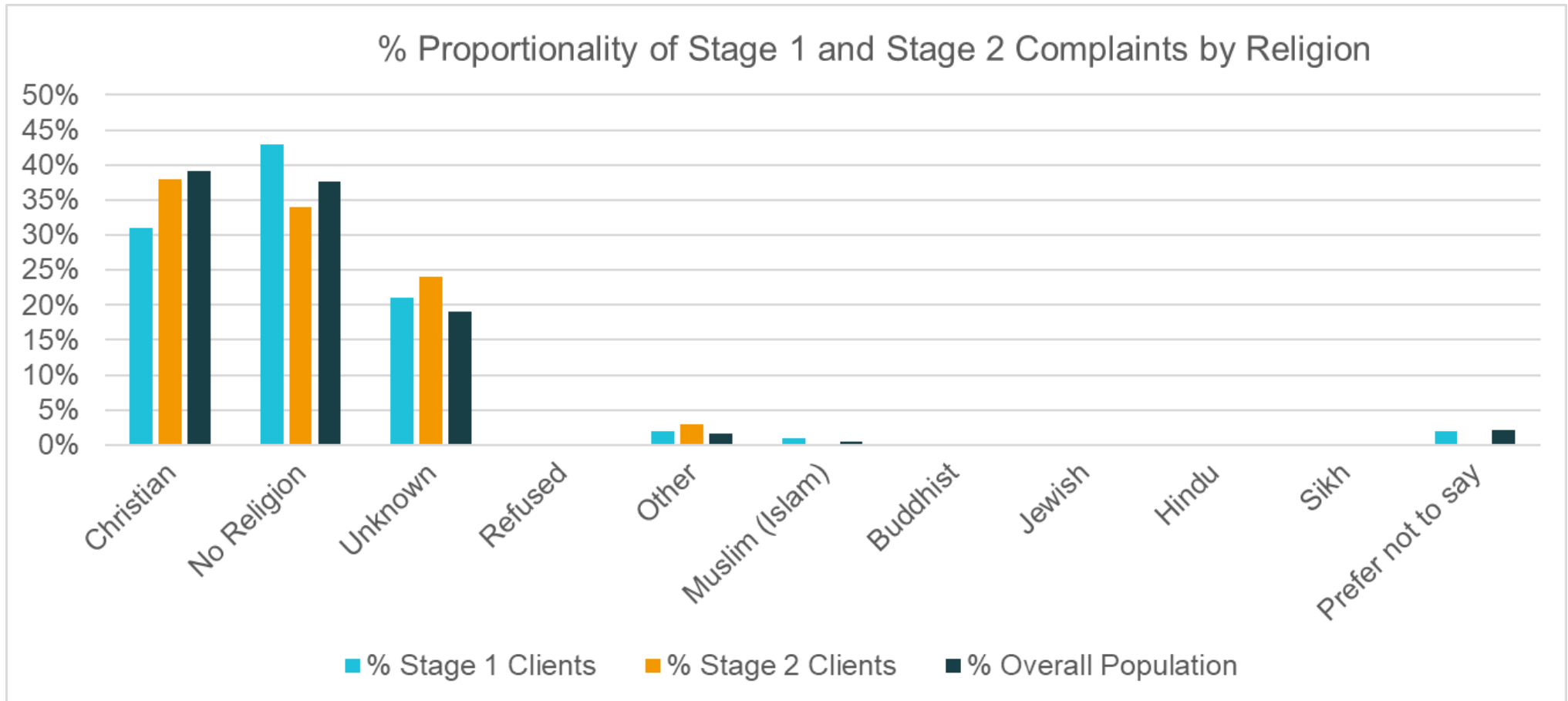
Ethnic Origin	% Stage 1 Clients	% Stage 2 Clients	% Overall Population
White:British/Wel/Scot/Nlr	83%	86%	86.40%
Unknown	12%	7%	8.50%
White Other	2%		2.09%
White Irish			0.70%
Prefer not to say			0.51%
Black/Af/Car/BlkBrit: African			0.22%
Black/Af/Car/BlkBrit: Caribbean			0.03%
Asian/Asian British: Other			0.18%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	2%	3%	0.19%
Arab			0.14%
Mixed White & Black African	1%	3%	0.13%
Other Chinese / Other Ethnic			0.08%
Mixed White & Asian			0.08%
Other Ethnic Background			0.27%
Mixed Other			0.18%
Black/Af/Car/BlkBrit: Other			0.08%
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani			0.05%
Asian/Asian British: Chinese			0.03%
Asian/Asian British: Banglad			0.02%
Asian/Asian British: Indian			0.03%
White: Gypsy / Irish Traveller			0.10%

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



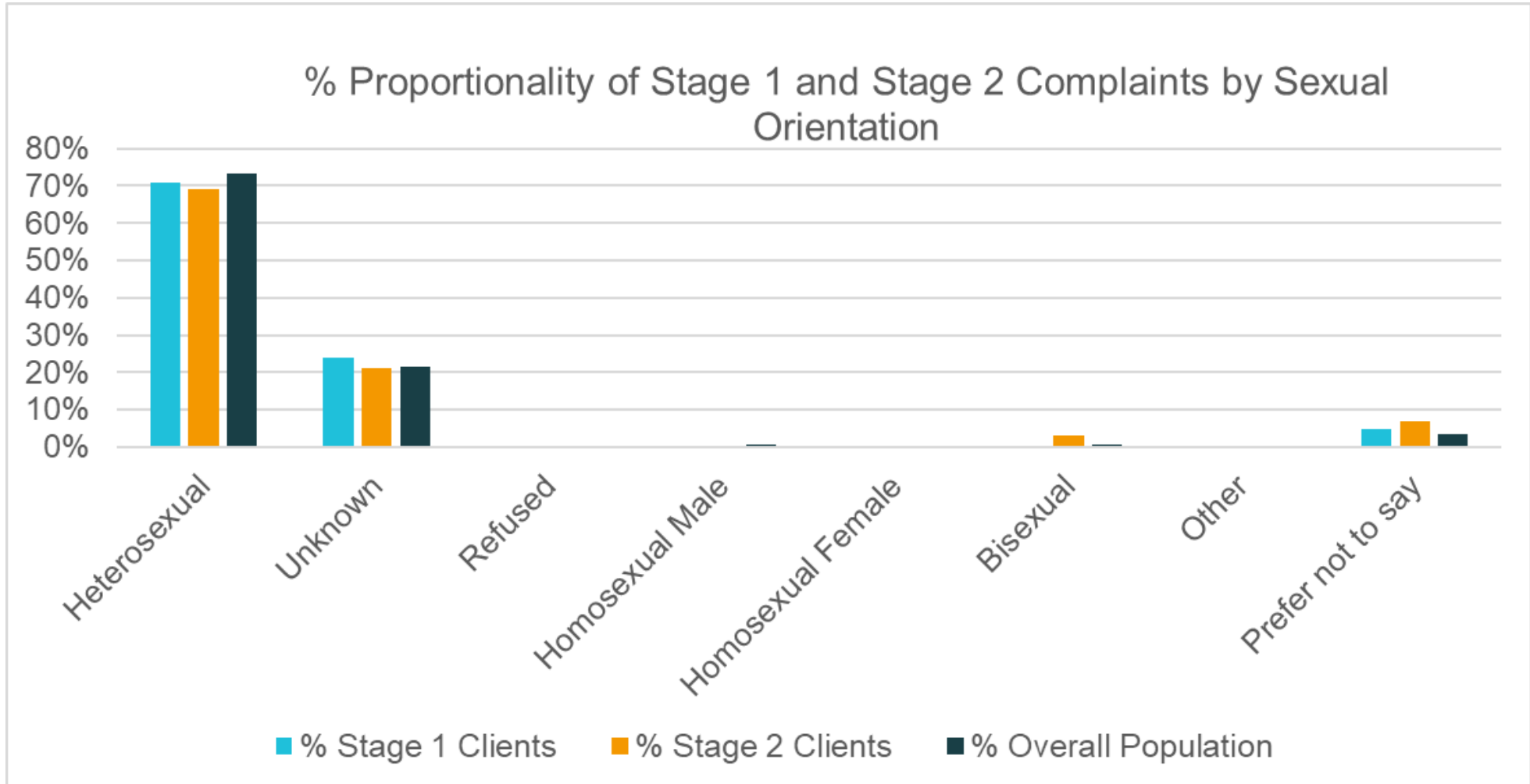
Gender	% Stage 1 Clients	% Stage 2 Clients	% Overall Population
Female	74%	76%	62%
Male	26%	24%	38%
Other / Gender Neutral	0%		0%
Unknown	0%		0%

Religion : Fluctuations in the proportions between known and unknown Religions.




Religion or belief	% Stage 1 Clients	% Stage 2 Clients	% Overall Population
Christian	31%	38%	39%
No Religion	43%	34%	38%
Unknown	21%	24%	19%
Refused			0%
Other	2%	3%	2%
Muslim (Islam)	1%		0%
Buddhist			0%
Jewish			0%
Hindu			0%
Sikh			0%
Prefer not to say	2%		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	71%	69%	73%
Unknown	24%	21%	22%
Refused			0%
Homosexual Male			1%
Homosexual Female			0%
Bisexual		3%	1%
Other			0%
Prefer not to say	5%	7%	3%

Actions taken to put things right or how we do things differently because of resident feedback. April 2023 – March 2024:

Service Area	What you told us	What we did
Responsive Repairs	You told us that when your shower stopped working and required replacement there was a delay caused by the replacement shower needing to be ordered.	We have arranged to have a larger supply of showers available from stock to avoid delays in future.
Responsive Repairs / Assets	You told us that when a major repair to your home required approval to be sought for the cost of the work, before work could be planned in you were not kept informed of progress and were unclear of the process and timescales.	We have reviewed our process and now contact tenants to explain this process when we submit the request for landlord approval and now advise tenants of the outcome of the approval request, and what will happen next.
Responsive Repairs	That when plastering works were carried out you were not made aware of how the work would affect you and your home or how you could prepare for the work to take place.	<p>We created an information leaflet explaining what you should do to prepare for plastering work, what the work entails and what you need to do once the work is completed. This is shared with tenants when</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Plastering Information Sheet.pdf</p> </div> <p>plastering work is approved.</p>
Gas	That you were left without central heating after you switched on your heating at the beginning of winter and found that it was faulty, and you had to wait for it to be repaired.	We carried out a social media campaign to advise you to switch on your heating in Autumn before cold weather arrived and report any faults so that they could be repaired before the heating was required.

Service Area	What you told us	What we did
Assets / Housing Management	That you were not able to provide a family member with a new fob to access your block after the door entry control system had been upgraded, as we were unable to issue new door entry access fobs due to a technical fault after installation.	<p>We reviewed our process and now ensure we test all newly installed access control installations thoroughly before signing them off with the installer. In addition to this we now ask installers to provide a supply of spare pre-programmed fobs in addition to those issued to tenants, so we can dip into these if there is an issue.</p> <p>This then led us to create an emergency 'banked stock' of pre-programmed fobs for all blocks, ensuring that if there are any technical issues, we can always provide tenants with a fob to access their block.</p>
Responsive Repairs	You told us that you had to wait too long for us to carry out works to rectify damp issues in your home.	We have worked with our main contractor to increase the resources available to carry out this type of work.
Responsive Repairs	That when damp works were carried out after a survey certain tasks such as removing and rehangng a radiator where not identified and were missed, and you had to report these to us.	We have instructed our contractor to identify, as part of the damp survey, all jobs required to complete the work fully to avoid these being missed when the jobs are planned.
Responsive Repairs	That where damp works were planned to be carried out in several rooms at once, this was hard to manage and disruptive.	We have instructed our contractor that where work needs to be planned in multiple rooms, they should be led by the tenant to plan these consecutively to minimise disruption.

Service Area	What you told us	What we did
Gas	You told us that when you reported low pressure on your boiler an operative attended and repressurised the system but did not identify the root cause of the issue. This led to a repeat call out when the issue re-occurred.	We have instructed our contractor that when they attend a call out for low pressure, they must carry out an inspection of the entire system to identify any faults which may be causing the low pressure.
Income	You told us that when you contacted us regarding your rent account you were left unclear as to how much you owed and how much you needed to pay.	Further telephone conversation training has been provided to the relevant staff members to ensure the explanations they provide to tenants are clear and easy to understand.