

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Annual Complaints Report 2018

Meeting/Date: Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships)
– 4th October 2018
Corporate Governance Committee – 10th October 2018

Executive Portfolio: Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for Digital and Customer

Report by: Adrian Dobbyne, Corporate Team Manager

Wards affected: All

Executive Summary:

The report provides Members with information on complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) 2017/18 along with data relating to stage 1 and stage 2 complaints received by the council between April 2017 – March 2018.

Recommendation(s):

Members are invited to comment on the LGO local authority report for Huntingdonshire District Council and the data relating to formal stage 1 and stage 2 complaints received.

1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE?

- 1.1 This report provides Members with information on complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman and those received by the council April 2017 – March 2018.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 One of the purposes of the annual summary of statistics on complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) is to help ensure that learning from complaints helps inform service provision. The LGO statistics show complaints and enquiries received by service area and whether a decision was upheld, not upheld, advice given, closed after initial enquiry, incomplete/invalid, or referred back for local resolution.
- 2.2 A further purpose of this report is to provide Members with data relating to stage 1 and stage 2 complaints by Service area.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 There were slightly more complaints/enquires received by the LGO during 2017/18 - 20 complaints in total, including those which did not progress to the LGO assessment stage or beyond. There were three detailed investigations carried out by the LGO in 2017/18. In summary:

Two were **upheld**:

- Planning Enforcement matter - the LGO upheld a complaint about the council's planning enforcement investigation. Although the LGO have not found fault with the council's decisions about whether structures were permitted development, there was fault in the council's communications with the complainant (delayed response). The LGO have agreed a remedy which was to recommend that the council make a formal decision about whether it was expedient to enforce the breach of planning permission it had identified. The Planning Enforcement Team have also made a lot of effort to make timely decisions and communicate them effectively.
- Planning Decision - there was some fault by the council in the way in which it responded to the initial complaint. The council has apologised for this. The complainant did not suffer injustice through the fault in relation to the substantive planning issues raised.

One was **not upheld**

- Planning Enforcement matter - the council properly investigated complaints about breaches of planning control. It exercised its discretion to seek a negotiated solution through discussion and a retrospective application to regularise breaches. That was an approach it was entitled to take. The process took some time but there was no undue delay in the council's actions.
- 3.2 The number of stage 1 complaints has risen significantly, largely as a result of the refuse/recycling round reconfiguration which took place early 2017. The majority of complaints related to missed bin collections, in Quarter 1 (April – June 2017) there were a total of 280 complaints of which 270 were Operations. The high volume of missed bin complaints meant that many of these were not resolved within 20 working days.

3.3 The number of stage 2 complaints has risen proportionately to the number of stage 1 complaints. Figures indicate that complaints are largely being resolved at stage 1, which is positive indication that formal complaints are being dealt with effectively in the first instance.

3.4 Leisure and Health Active Lifestyles record complaints through their own systems, however it was agreed that a clear reporting and monitoring process for Leisure and Health formal complaints should be put in place as a priority and to ensure the process aligns with the corporate approach. Some progress was made during 2017/18, for example One Leisure are now providing the Corporate Office with their complaints spreadsheets, thus enabling the team to record and report on the data. However this could be further improved by investigating whether data could be imported directly into the Corporate Complaints SharePoint site.

3.5 Further progress with the implementation of the Complaints Lean Review includes:

Obtaining clarity and agreement on definition of a complaint being used across the council and streamlining how Services record and monitor complaints:

- Individual workshops with Operations, Development, One Leisure – to explore what their issues and challenges they experience with the current complaints process.
- Following each of these workshops a challenge brief was created (record of outcomes and next steps). The challenge brief was then presented to each Head of Service.

New recording system or upgrade to current system, decide on developing a new system, procure a new system, adapt the current system or adapt another existing system

- Investigating adaption of current Complaints SharePoint site – 3C ICT suggested it may not be advisable to commit extensive resources to amending existing Complaints SharePoint site as it was unclear whether SharePoint would align with new CRM system.
- Procuring a new system – team visit to Cambridge City who use Complaints Tracker software. Although the system seemed fit for purpose it is likely to incur a considerable cost.
- Adapt another existing system - Vuelio (Freedom of Information System) was explored but it would still require duplicate data entry from complaints received via our on line portal.

3.6 Although 3C ICT advised not to update the current Complaints SharePoint site, the lack of a timescale when new CRM/IEG4 would go live combined with an urgent need for reliable recording of complaints data a decision was made to proceed with the redesign of current Complaints SharePoint site. This did not incur any cost apart from minimal staff time to develop, test and implement. Feedback from staff included that the site is much easier to read and understand and far less cluttered.

3.7 The project structure to deliver the Customer Portal is being sorted and the scope of the work is also coming together. The software is installed and some of the technical 'behind the scenes' work to set things up is happening now. Delivering customer complaints through the portal is very much in scope, but the order of which functions and being delivered through this is still being determined. It will be an iterative release, which means that we will be able to launch and improve the service too and then work to develop the further reporting systems and processes in place.

- 3.8 It has not been possible to visit all Services to explore issues and challenges however the three Services chosen were those with highest number of complaints recorded and it was decided that any learning from these workshops could be shared with the remaining Services.
- 3.9 The complaints policy and internal staff guidance on management of complaints has not been reviewed, this has been due to a lack of resource to undertake this work.
- 3.10 As part of the Action Plans arising out of the Challenge Briefs, Services were asked to give consideration to whether it would be more efficient and effective if the Heads of Service or members of Management Team undertook more stage 2 complaints. During 2018 there has been a slight increase in stage 2 complaints being managed by these Managers.
- 3.11 In 2017/18, we recorded a number of Unreasonable Complainants and reviewed three cases. It became increasingly clear that the application of our policies was not being followed as strictly as it should and was subsequently placing some staff in difficult positions. In a couple of cases, we have reiterated our position to the management of such cases, such as having a single point of contact, so that far greater proportionality is achieved in the amount of time spent on these cases. This has led to us withdrawing some of our services to these three complainants, save for statutory obligations.
- 3.12 There have been a few incidents of complainants being rude, using inappropriate language or tone to our employees and this has highlighted a need to have a corporate approach to be outlined and communicated to staff so that we can consistently support our staff in such situations and take a zero tolerance on such matters.

4. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

- 4.1 With Complaints, there is always a risk that we do not record all the complaints we receive and so do not have the full picture or identify trends. Complaints continue to come in by a variety of means with a number of systems and people to comprehensively and accurately record them all.

We have been unable to make all of the changes required i.e. we still don't have a system in place that gives us the best opportunity to have a comprehensive recording and monitoring system and so are unable to state confidently that all Services are consistently applying the corporate definition of a complaint.

5. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

- 5.1 Complaints handling links to the following Strategic Priority within the Corporate Plan - Ensuring we are a customer focused and service led council.

6 REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 6.1 Members are invited to note the LGO local authority report for Huntingdonshire District Council and note the data relating to stage 1 and stage 2 complaints received by the council.

7. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1	LGO statistics for HDC
Appendix 2	HDC internal complaints
Appendix 3	LGO statistics – neighbouring authority comparison

CONTACT OFFICERS

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Appendix 1 LGO Local Authority Report – Huntingdonshire District Council

Complaints and Enquiries Received

HDC	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Environment Services	Planning and Development	Housing	Highways and Transport	Total
2017/18	2	5	3	7	1	1	19
2016/17	2	2	2	8	0	2	16
2015/16	7	2	2	11	1	0	23
2014/15	3	3	3	7	0	0	16

Decisions Made

HDC	Upheld	Not upheld	Advice given	Closed after initial enquiry	Incomplete/invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Total
2017/18	2	1	1	6	0	10	20
2016/17	1	1	0	5	0	9	16
2015/16	1	1	0	11	0	8	21
2014/15	0	3	1	7	0	5	16

A number of cases will have been received and decided in different business years, this means the number of complaints and enquiries received will not always match the number of decisions made.

Appendix 2 HDC Recorded Complaints

Year	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of complaints	40	43	22 Stage 1	15 Stage 1 14 Stage 2	237 Stage 1 15 Stage 2	284 Stage 1 12 Stage 2	565 Stage 1 23 Stage 2

Service	Stage 1		Stage 2		Total		LGO investigations	
	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18
Community	13	2	1	1	14	3		
Corporate Team	3	4	2	-	5	4		
Customer Services	24	11	2	4	26	15		
Development	18	24	3	5	21	29	2	3
Operations (1)	149	480	3	12	152	492		
Resources	1	-	-	1	1	1		
Leisure and Health (2)	76	42	4		76	42		
Shared Services	-	2	-	-	-	2		
Community/Development/Legal	-	-	1	-	1	-		
Total	284	565	12	23	296	588	2	3

Notes (1) Operations do not include most complaints relating to Bin Collections made in Quarter 4 2016/17, following the introduction of new waste collection rounds. (2) 2015/16 and 2016/17 include those recorded by One Leisure which were not shown in previous years.

Appendix 3 LGO Neighbouring Authorities Statistics

Cambridgeshire Councils	Complaints and enquiries decided (by outcome)		Complaints and enquiries received	
	Not upheld	Upheld	<u>2017/18</u>	<u>(2016/17)</u>
<u>2017/18</u>				
HDC	1	2	19	(16)
South Cambridgeshire	1	6	23	(22)
Fenland	0	3	13	(17)
East Cambridgeshire	1	2	14	(6)
Cambridge City	1	2	19	(18)
Cambridgeshire County Council	3	5	39	(51)