

**Public**  
**Key Decision - No**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Annual Complaints Report 2018-19

**Meeting/Date:** Corporate Governance Committee 02/10/19

**Executive Portfolio:** Councillor Tysoe Executive Councillor for Digital and Customer

**Report by:** Adrian Dobbyne Corporate Team Manager

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **Executive Summary:**

The report provides Members with information on complaints referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) during 2018/19. 17 complaints were received by the LGO, four were investigated. Of the four complaints investigated, only one was upheld. The report also provides data relating to Stage One and Stage Two complaints received by the Council between April 2018 – March 2019, broad themes and lessons learnt from these have been considered.

### **Recommendation(s):**

The Committee is invited to comment on the LGO local authority report for Huntingdonshire District Council and the data relating to formal Stage One and Stage Two complaints received.

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Members with information on complaints referred to the LGO and those received by the Council April 2018 – March 2019.

## 2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 One of the purposes of the annual summary of statistics on complaints made to the 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 One and Stage Two complaints by Service area.

## 3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 There were 17 complaints received by the LGO during 2018/19 (19 received during 2017/18) this includes those which did not progress to the LGO assessment stage or beyond. Of these 17 complaints there were four detailed investigations carried out, of the four complaints investigated, only one was upheld.

In summary:

One was **upheld**:

- Planning - the Council was at fault in not providing the complainant with an opportunity to comment on a change of ground levels for a neighbouring development, but its apology was a suitable remedy for the limited injustice caused. The Council has taken suitable actions to mitigate the limited impact of the changed levels on the complainant's amenity

Three were **not upheld**:

- Planning - complaint about the way the Council managed an application for development. The Ombudsman found no evidence of fault in the way the Council considered these matters.
- Planning – complaint about the way the Council managed an application for development. The Ombudsman found no evidence of fault in the way the Council considered these matters.
- Planning – complaint that the Council failed to properly determine a neighbour's planning application and it failed to properly consider an enforcement matter. The Ombudsman found no evidence of fault in the way the Council considered these matters.

- 3.2 The LGO has created a new interactive map - [Your Council's Performance](#) (see App 5 for snapshot of graphics) the site also provides helpful links to decisions made on all cases where the LGO have been involved. It should be noted that most cases are closed after initial enquiries made.

- 3.3 The number of Stage One complaints (419) has decreased from last year (565).
- 224 complaints received by Operations, these related mainly to missed bins<sup>1</sup> (for context approx. 6 million bins were collected)
  - 93 complaints received by Leisure & Health, these related mainly to poor service and site facilities (for context in total there were over 226 5538 admissions)
  - 46 complaints received by Development, these related mainly to Planning decisions
  - 43 complaints received by Customer Services, these related mainly to Council procedures e.g. decisions made
  - 8 complaints received by Community these related mainly to Council procedures e.g. decisions made
  - 3 complaints received by Shared Services; no general theme identified
  - 1 complaint received by Corporate Team, this related to poor service
  - 1 complaint received by Resources, this related to Council procedures.

One Leisure are now providing the Corporate Office with their complaint's spreadsheets, thus enabling the team to record and report on the data.

- 3.4 Twenty Stage Two complaints were received, this indicates that complaints are largely being resolved at Stage One, which is positive indication that formal complaints are being dealt with effectively in the first instance. Themes and lessons learnt from Stage One and Stage Two complaints are included in Appendix 3.

- 3.5 Annual Performance monitoring:
- 85% of Stage One complaints were resolved within time (PI 38a) against a target of 95%, 46 of 60 late responses this year relate to complaints about services provided by Operations.
  - Responses to Stage Two complaints were also below target at 81% (against a target of 95%) with three not responded to within time this year.

### 3.6 Complaints Tracker

The Complaints SharePoint site continues to be well used by staff across HDC and has improved the process of tracking and monitoring complaints, Q4 2018/19 reported a 100% response rate of all complaints with no outstanding items requiring follow up, marking a significant improvement. There are still challenges that are being encountered such as Customer Services still requiring to use their own CRM system which can cause delays when tracking complaints raised in their system, but this is being looked at as part of the Customer Portal Complaints System that is being developed by SCDC with support from HDC.

### 3.7 Customer Portal

A complaints tracking system is being developed within the IEG4 (Customer Portal) Platform; this work is being led by SCDC to their

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<sup>1</sup> Missed bins not recorded as a formal complaint until report of a 4th missed bin / returned bin through CRM in the last 6 months

timescales, with HDC working collaboratively with their Project Team. The discovery phase started at the end of May 2019 and the building process is currently underway; the Corporate Project Officer at HDC is helping with a view to implementing and adopting this as a replacement for the HDC Complaints Tracker system, if it proves a suitable alternative. The new system would likely require a review on how complaints are assigned to officers within HDC and could provide an opportunity to review/refresh the complaints policy as the ways of working would change with this new system.

- 3.8 In 2018/19, four people were classified/continue to be classified as Unreasonable Complainants. All cases are active. All have a single point of contact at HDC, all cases have been managed better this year, although in one case some officers were involved unnecessarily. Cases can involve the LGO and ICO, but we are managing these cases in a way that does not entail a disproportionate amount of time at the expense of other residents.

#### **4. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 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 and so it relies on too many systems and people to comprehensively and accurately record them all.
- 4.2 We still don't have a system in place that gives us the best opportunity to have a comprehensive recording and monitoring system, however, the Complaints Tracker is helping.
- 4.3 Next year the aim will be to provide a more comprehensive breakdown of themes and lessons learnt by Service area and display complaints in the context of customer transactions e.g. as a % of total customer transactions per Service area.

#### **5. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES** *([See 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 One and Stage Two complaints received by the Council.

#### **7. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 LGO statistics for HDC

- Appendix 2 HDC internal complaints
- Appendix 3 Complaints – themes and lessons learnt
- Appendix 4 LGO statistics – neighbouring authority comparison
- Appendix 5 LGO graphics

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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
2018/19	6	3	2	6	0	0	17
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

## Decisions Made

HDC	Upheld	Not Upheld	Advice Given	Closed After Initial Enquiry	Incomplete/Invalid	Referred Back For Local Resolution	Total
2018/19	1	3	0	6	0	5	15
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

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**

Service	Stage One			Stage Two			Total			LGO investigations		
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Community	13	2	8	1	1	4	14	3	12	-	-	-
Corporate Team	3	4	1	2	-	1	5	4	2	-	-	-
Customer Services	24	11	43	2	4	7	26	15	50	-	-	-
Development	18	24	46	3	5	5	21	29	51	2	3	4
Operations (1)	149	480	224	3	12	3	152	492	227	-	-	-
Resources	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
Leisure and Health	76	42	93	4	-	-	76	42	93	-	-	-
Shared Services	-	2	3	-	-	-	-	2	3	-	-	-
Community/Development/Legal	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	284	565	419	12	23	20	296	588	439	2	3	4

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.

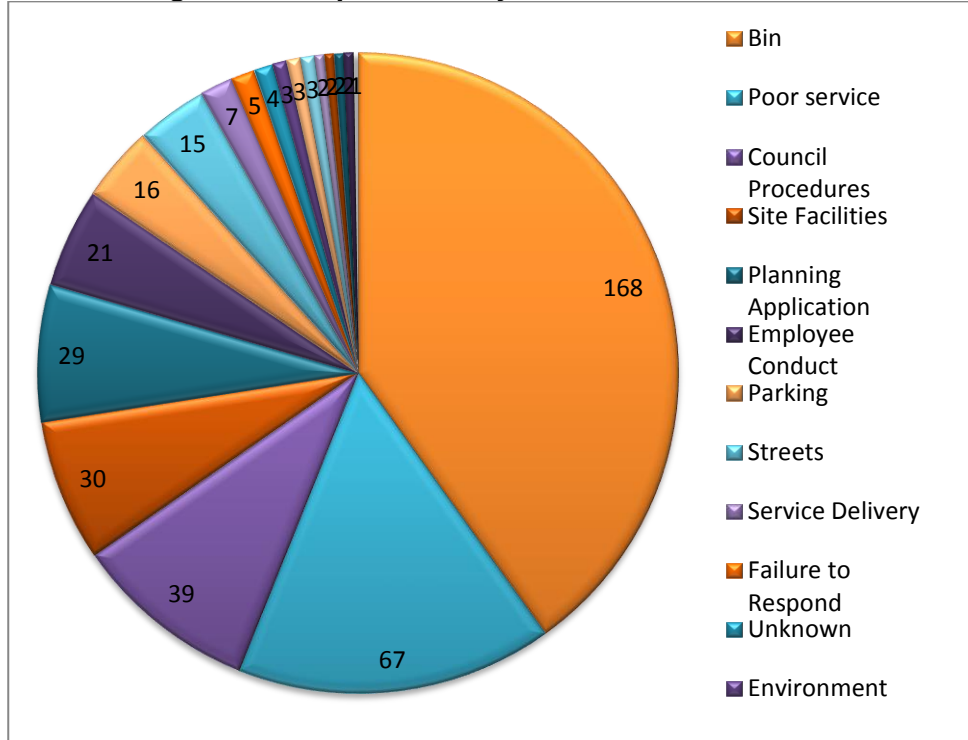
**Appendix 3            2018/19 Stage Two complaints lessons learnt and themes**

	<b>Service</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Lessons learnt</b>
1	Community	Complaint about taxi driver. Delay in responding to Stage One complaint	Clearer accountability within the team for how complaints are managed
2	Community	Neighbour dispute re trees.	Home visit was helpful to better understand both customer and Council perspective - further clarification provided
3	Community	Damage to fencing caused by people parking in a supermarket car park.	Further clarification provided
4	Community	Enforcement of Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN)	Location of offence not detailed in FPN or covering letter and acknowledgement that more careful language in correspondence to avoid misinterpretation needed. Team informed and issues addressed
5	Customer Services	Poor customer service on telephone.	Training and guidance for staff member
6	Customer Services	Council tax bill. Customer unable to get through on phone to query Council Tax bill.	Further clarification provided – correspondence outlines the various other ways to contact the Council
7	Customer Services	Council Tax recovery. Dissatisfaction with Council policy on Council Tax for properties which are uninhabitable	Further clarification provided
8	Customer Services	Housing benefit overpayment recovery. Complaints policy not followed plus delay in responding to customer	Processes reviewed
9	Customer Services	Business tax recovery.	Further clarification provided and team noted customer feedback on this matter
10	Customer Services	Council tax recovery, way in which Council took action to recover Council Tax debt	Further clarification provided
11	Customer Services	Business tax - customer claims that staff failed to provide advice about Valuation Office Agency	Further clarification provided
12	Corporate Team	Land charges - delay in responding to customer to confirm the Council's final position re access to land charges searches & reasonable adjustments due to disability	Further clarification provided



	<b>Service</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Lessons learnt</b>
13	Development	Information on Public Access, customer unhappy with comments on planning application made publicly available	Reminder to staff to follow practices re considering wishes of objector
14	Development	Development Management - neighbour notification when changes made to development	Home visit was helpful to better understand both customer and Council perspective. Policy amended to ensure neighbours informed when amendment proposed to floor and ground levels
15	Development	Planning Enforcement – enforcement of permitted development and delays in responding to customer	Apology to customer for delay
16	Development	CIL regulations - lack of clarity over CIL regulations and chargeable development	Acknowledgement that regulations are difficult to understand, team made aware
17	Development	Development Management - customer unhappy they were unable to have a meeting or telephone conversation with Planning Officer about their objections to planning application	Clarification provided to the customer
18	Operations	Grounds Maintenance - trees blocking light to a customer's property	Authority given for the progression of tree felling and new planting
19	Operations	Grounds Maintenance - customer concerned about impact of grass cutting on wildlife	Further clarification provided, and reassurance provided to the customer
20	Operations	Refuse/recycling - concern about early morning bin collection. Initial online enquiry not responded to.	Further clarification provided to the customer re rounds schedules. Apology for enquiry not dealt with effectively (issue with online form).

**2018/19 Stage One complaints – key themes**



**Total complaints - 419**

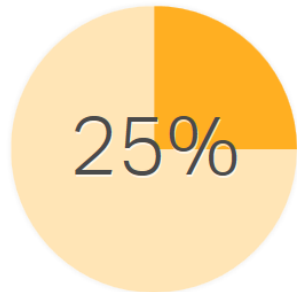
Service	Lessons learnt
<b>Community</b>	Importance of early differentiation between complaints about service and requests for service Importance of engaging with complainant at early stage to establish dialogue. Importance of engaging with partners where there are joint aspects to a complaint Importance of involving front line staff in investigation and lessons learned phases.
<b>Corporate Team</b>	Additional clarity in correspondence required
<b>Customer Services</b>	Advice given to staff Email/letter template created to send to customers to clarify difference between a complaint and an Appeal to the Valuation Tribunal Service. Amendments made to complaints and Feedback page on the website
<b>Development</b>	Review of procedures Training rolled out for officers, agents forums launched, increased DMC training, new consultation letters/templates, improved collaboration between teams
<b>Operations</b>	Advice/instruction given to Staff Review/Change in procedures
<b>Leisure &amp; Health</b>	Continued regular inspection & cleaning Advice/training for staff Activity timetable reviewed & amended
<b>Resources</b>	N/A
<b>Shared Services</b>	Clearer signposting on Planning Portal on how to obtain assistance with the site if something goes wrong

Appendix 4 LGO Neighbouring Authorities Statistics

Cambridgeshire Councils	Complaints and enquiries decided (by outcome)		Complaints and enquiries received	
	<a href="#">2018/19</a>	Not upheld	Upheld	2018/19
Huntingdonshire	3	1	15	19
South Cambridgeshire	2	3	18	23
Fenland	3	1	13	13
East Cambridgeshire	6	2	16	14
Cambridge City	0	3	13	19
Cambridgeshire County Council	5	8	53	39

## App 5 extract from LGO - Your Performance website

### Complaints upheld



■ **25%** of complaints we investigated were upheld.

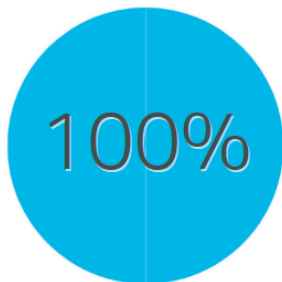
This compares to an average of **43%** in similar authorities.

**1**  
upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of 4 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019

Source: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

### Satisfactory remedies provided by the Council



■ In **100%** of upheld cases we found the Council had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **12%** in similar authorities.

**1**  
satisfactory remedy decisions

Statistics are based on a total of 4 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019

Source: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)